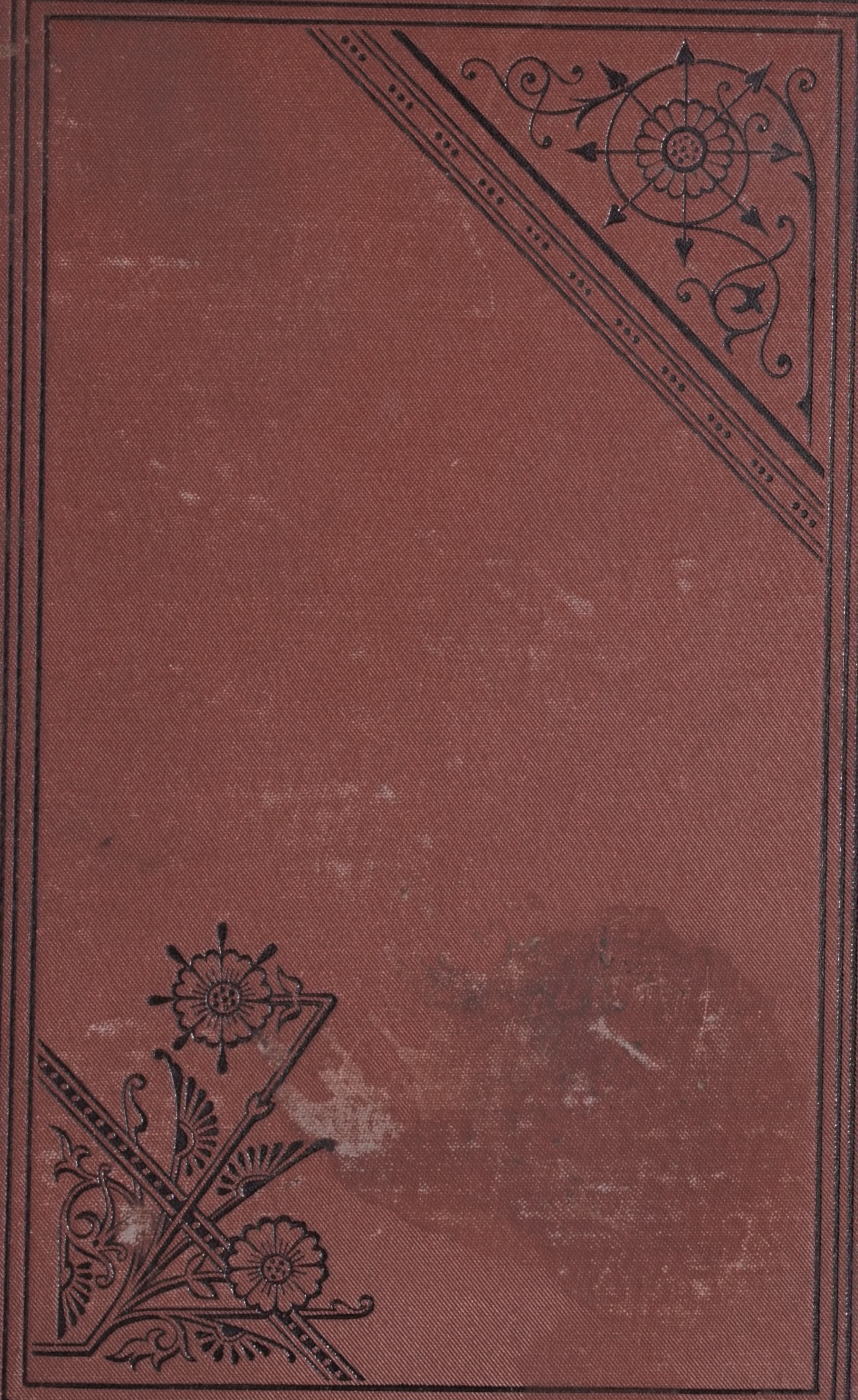

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KATE COMERFORD;

OR,

SKETCHES OF GARRISON LIFE.

BY

TERESA A. THORNET.

35

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KATE COMERFORD;

OR,

SKETCHES OF GARRISON LIFE.

PART FIRST.

ON THE LOWER RIO GRANDE.

CHAPTER I.

As a beginning, here is a letter from the wife of Captain George Ashbur, of the United States Army, to her sister, resident in New York:

"KNOCKTIN BARRACKS, TEXAS,
"September 3, 185–.

"MY DEAR EDITH:

"Now that the bustle and confusion incident to the unpacking and arranging of our few worldly possessions in the new home are over, and we are at last fairly settled at this post, I shall fulfil my promise of letting you know something of our garrison life and surroundings in this far-away country.

"The situation of Knocktin Barracks, on the

Lower Rio Grande, is remarkably picturesque. The country on the Texan side for many miles up and down the river, and stretching back toward the north, is covered with what may more correctly be termed an *orchard* than a forest of musquite-trees, having a plentiful undergrowth of every variety of cactus. The musquite closely resembles the peach-tree in form and size; the foliage, of the lightest shade of green, grows in regular sprays like that of the black locust, but with smaller and more delicate leaves.

"No tulip-garden can equal in variety and splendor the flowers of the cactus. We see the tall and slender *stick* cactus, from four to six feet in height, with stems no larger than your finger, and bearing on top long clusters of bright-red blossoms not unlike those of the cypress-vine. Then there are Turks'-heads, ever so much larger than life, if not quite so natural, and also the well-named snake-cactus. Perhaps the largest and richest of all is the prickly pear with its tulip-shaped flowers,—orange, lemon, brown, straw-colored, and variegated. Forget the little stunted specimens we have at home, and figure to yourself, as the French say, plants six or eight feet tall, with leaves the size of a large dinner-plate and about an inch in thickness. Indeed, there seems no end to the ramifications of the cacti family. I notice that the plants of this region are almost invariably furnished with thorns or nettles, doubtless for protection from the goats and *burros;* otherwise, in the total absence of grass, there might

be no green thing left upon the face of the earth. And, now that I come to think of it, the armor of the gentle armadillo, which has its home in this region of *chaparral*, must have been bestowed upon him as a shield from the thorns that beset his pathway in life.

"Just here, my dear Edith, I am tempted to indulge in some moral reflections, instituting a comparison between the armadillo and mankind. But I spare you, and shall instead try to give you some idea of Knocktin Barracks and the present inhabitants thereof.

"On a steep hill is perched the white house of the commanding officer,—a one-story frame building, surrounded by a wide veranda, and having so many windows and doors that I always have the impression of being in a pilot-house as I view the winding river from that altitude. This house stands farther back from the river than the other quarters, and from the south side veranda you look down upon the parade-ground and the quarters of the other officers, —eight sets in all, four on either side the parade. The soldiers' quarters are still nearer the river-bank.

"Our houses are comfortable,—one-story wooden buildings with green shutters and wide porches. On the east of the parade-ground,—that is, to your left as you look down from the commanding officer's hill,—in the first set of quarters reside Captain Duval and family; in the adjoining set, Major Silvers and wife. The next set is occupied by bachelor officers, —Lieutenants Waters and Volney.

"These young men, unlike as possible in person and character, are inseparable. One always sees them arm-in-arm when off duty. The pair remind me of a large good-natured mastiff and an Italian greyhound. Jack Waters is a sorrel-headed Kentucky giant, with large, coarse features, quiet in manner, and rather sluggish in intellect; his gait retains as much of the *Kentucky swing* as is consistent with military training.

"Lieutenant Paul Volney, though tall, is half a head below Waters. He has a remarkably long neck, small head and sloping shoulders, regular features, brown hair, and large bright eyes; is very quick in all his movements, enthusiastic and affectionate in disposition, and boyish in manner. Each of us married ladies has a kind of elder-sisterly feeling for him.

"The fourth and last set on that side of the garrison Captain Rubenstein, of the artillery, occupies all to himself. He is a dapper little blonde widower, with a long, straight moustache; always looks as if he had just stepped out of a band-box.

"Now, fortunately for me, in the choosing of quarters, which is always done according to rank, Mrs. Silvers and Mrs. Duval preferred the gayer side of the garrison,—that is, the one in full view of the parade. And Captain Rubenstein, who also ranks my husband, waived his right of choice in our favor. Thus we have what I consider the most desirable set in Knocktin Barracks.

"Because our house faces the east, and is quite out

of sight of the parade, consequently I may sit *en dêshabillé* on our front porch with the children without being in full view of all the world and the rest of mankind (as our dear old General Taylor once remarked), and I can keep Master Clay, now five years old, out of the broiling sun, which would be a difficult matter were the soldiers always in sight.

"But I must explain that we owe our sheltered position to the fact that there stands, a little in advance of and to the west of the hill of the commanding officer, a second hill, set there by Mother Nature for the express purpose of upholding the Star-Spangled Banner, for this is the hill of the flag-staff. And I am the old woman who lives under the hill.

"So if you were coming to see me from the other side of the barracks, you must, after crossing the parade-ground, skirt around the foot of the flag-staff hill until you reach its western side; here, passing through a low white gate, you find yourself—well, the extent of our grounds would hardly permit you to *lose* yourself—in a small sandy yard, the path to the porch fringed by several varieties of the irrepressible cactus. Here and there you observe a cluster of mammoth Palma Christi plants, with their red-veined umbrella-like leaves. This plant is perennial here, not an annual, as in the North, and is our *shrubbery*, and not cultivated for medical purposes, as you might suppose.

"The wide porch is shaded by ivy and Madeira-vines, both indigenous here. From this shady porch you step into our sitting-room. Do not fancy, be-

cause you observe the two windows opening on the porch guiltless of sash, that Uncle Sam has denied us the luxury of window-glass.

"The sash is carefully stowed away, not to be brought out for use until the coming of winter,—if indeed the short season of cool weather about Christmas may be dignified by the name of winter.

"The wide and low-roofed porches protect from rain, and we need every breath of air that can be coaxed to enter, for the climate is decidedly *warm.* The nights, however, are usually cool with a pleasant breeze. And, what with rising early to enjoy the cool of the morning, keeping as quiet as mice, with closed shutters and flowing garments, at mid-day, taking a refreshing bath before dinner (we lunch at one and dine at five), and after dinner indulging in a stroll through the garrison or a climb to the seats around the flag-staff, from whence we have a lovely view of the winding river and of the pale, tender green of the musquite forest, and also of such glorious sunsets as are simply indescribable,—what with all these mitigating circumstances and precautions, together with agreeable society, we manage to pass the time very pleasantly.

"The floor of our sitting-room is covered with a straw matting in green and white checks, a present from a Cuban friend. On the south side of the room is a small open fireplace, at present filled with the branches of the ebony and musquite trees in contrasting shades. The mantelpiece is decorated by the pair of flat brass candlesticks given me by mother

(do you remember how you and I drew straws to decide which should have them?), and which Aunt Phebe, our cook, keeps as bright as gold; they are tipped up against the wall that none of their beauty may be lost to the eye. The mantel is further embellished by a birch-bark porcupine-quill-embroidered cigar-case and a few large shells of ocean; nor must I forget to mention Master Clay's new drum, which treasure he insists is not safe from baby George's teeth and chubby fists anywhere else.

"Above the mantel hangs a large steel engraving of 'Our Saviour Blessing Little Children.'

"And on the opposite wall, near the window opening to the north, at which I now sit writing, you will observe another picture. This was Henry Clay's Christmas gift from Aunt Phebe, and, as they both think it a wonderful work of art and a great honor to our poor sitting-room, I have not the heart to undeceive them or banish it to a less conspicuous station. A very pink Moses, with yellow eyes and bluish hair, is kicking up his heels in a rather modern clothes-basket; while Pharaoh's daughter—in a golden crown and five bracelets on each arm, and wearing a blue tunic, yellow bodice, and a scarlet train which floats gracefully on the deep blue water of the river—is leaning over the pink boy with a painful Grecian bend.

"On either side the fireplace, built into the wall, is a combination of cupboard, bookcase, and wardrobe, and I may add pantry, as I have no other place for keeping preserves and pickles. My work-stand

and George's writing-table, holding a few books and papers, several large camp-chairs covered with buff chintz, and a comfortable lounge, over which is thrown a bright Mexican blanket, complete the furniture of this room.

"Back of the sitting-room is our bed-room, looking comfortably cool in its carpet of white matting. Be careful not to stumble over the baby and his nurse (both asleep on the floor) as you pass through this room to a wide back porch, generally used as our dining-room. From this porch an open passage leads to the kitchen. And thus you have the sum-total of our accommodation, if we except the sort of basement-room under the kitchen,—an above-ground basement it is, our house being built on a hill-side. This we call our hen-house, though the rats seem to enjoy a prior claim, and even appear inclined to dispute with us the right to the upper rooms, to judge from the nightly reconnoitering parties we hear tripping up the steps of the back porch. Their pattering footsteps form not quite so pleasant a lullaby as the rain upon the roof.

"There are only five ladies here at present. On the opposite side of the garrison Mrs. Silvers and Mrs. Duval are next-door neighbors, as I have already mentioned; on this side Mrs. Francisco's quarters adjoin ours on the south. Indeed, our front porch is in common, the houses all being double ones.

"Major Silvers's wife is the only lady here past middle age; she claims to be near fifty, but her cheerful flow of spirits makes her the life of our little

circle. She is the jolliest little soul, fat and handsome, usually clad in bright colors, and always wearing a white turban-shaped cap of some thin material, from under which peep out a number of short jet-black curls, giving a *piquante*, laughing expression to her large black eyes.

"Mrs. Silvers says she has to matronize the rest of us, we are such a light-headed set. It really so happens that hers is the only dark hair among us.

"Mrs. Duval is such a complete contrast to Mrs. Silvers that it is laughable to see them together. The former is tall, slender, and lackadaisical, a perfect bundle of affectations. She never uses a plain, short word if it be possible to introduce a stilted one, imagines herself some sentimental heroine, and can surpass Sir Piercie Shafton in euphuisms. George can scarcely keep his countenance when she is talking, and we often wonder that Captain Duval is not ashamed of her nonsense; but so far from it, he thinks her perfection, I truly believe. All the sense she possesses has run into her finger-ends, for such music as she gives us is seldom heard among amateurs. And in singing (her voice is both sweet and powerful) all affectation is laid aside. This rare musical talent renders Mrs. Duval a valuable acquisition to our society. Hers is the only piano in the barracks; the rest of us have either had ours jolted to pieces in our constant wanderings, or have found the transportation more than our slim purses could bear.

"Lieutenant Francisco is my husband's most intimate friend, and I have formed a strong attachment

for his wife. Mrs. Francisco is more lovely in her generous disposition than in person, her gentle brown eyes being her only good feature. She is in feeble health, and it is feared that little Winny, their only child, will not long have a mother's care. Winny is a year younger than my boy Clay, and almost as dear to me as my own children.

"For a picture of Mrs. George Ashbur I refer you to memory. George says I am quite as good-looking as ever, and not much older, though I am now the dignified mother of two boys.

"But what shall I say of bewitching Kate Comerford, the daughter of our commanding officer? Such a perfect beauty she is that it is a thousand pities she should be here without a mother to keep her out of mischief.

"Kate is barely sixteen, and with her flaxen hair and blue eyes looks younger still; yet every young officer here is heels-over-head in love with her, and her curly head is in a fair way of being turned by their nonsense before her father sends her back to school; she is only spending her vacation with him.

"Even Dr. McBriar, our surgeon (he lives on our side the garrison), a crusty old bachelor, has allowed his affections for his botanical specimens and preserved monstrosities to be distracted by her charms, and his heart to stray in that direction.

"You must take into consideration that our officers on the frontier, poor fellows! do not see a young lady from one year's end to another, so that even a girl of

very moderate beauty and intellect would reign as a belle in a garrison.

"Though Miss Comerford is no relation of mine, we feel *cousinish,* because she is own cousin to our scapegrace nephew, Tom Heron. Tom, for some of his wild pranks at West Point, was rusticated last year, so his friends got him a situation in the sutler's store at this post,—only for a season, however, for he is determined to graduate yet. But I tell him he will never be tall enough to keep his sword from dangling and looking like an urchin on a stick-horse. Still, as he is but nineteen he may yet reach a respectable stature.

"His hair is almost as light as Kate's, and they are enough alike to pass for twins. Tom often says he would die happy if he could ever hope to own such a beard as 'Uncle George' has. The idea of a heavy, jet-black beard on Tom's innocent-looking face is ridiculous enough, for, as old Phebe says, 'Mas' Tom looks so meek, like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.'

"I shall be delighted when this nephew of mine returns to West Point, for, with his talent for mimicry and his love of practical jokes, he is the torment of my life.

"To-morrow is Miss Kate's sixteenth birthday, which is to be celebrated by an excursion to the *hacienda* of Don Santiago Mendoza, about five miles from the barracks.

"Among others, Miss Comerford has made a conquest of a Mexican officer stationed at the military post on the other side of the Rio Grande, and he has

asked permission of her father to be allowed the honor of presenting her some trifle as a birthday gift. Our officers have followed suit in making the same request, though it is probable that, except for the very proper example set them by the foreign officer, it would never have entered their heads to think the colonel's permission at all necessary. As Colonel Comerford has limited her acceptance to articles of small value, and Miss Kate is known to be very fond of pets, George says the men are racking their brains and roaming the forests (!) to find something to please the fair lady and eclipse each other.

"But here comes Tom, whistling so loud that he has waked the baby, so I hasten to sign myself

"Your affectionate sister,

"AGNES R. ASHBUR."

As Tom Heron enters and runs through to the bed-room to snatch up the screaming baby, while the sleepy black nurse is rubbing her eyes, *we* shall step forward and take up the story which Mrs. Ashbur has dropped.

Mrs. Agnes Ashbur is a lady of medium height, with very light brown hair and blue eyes. These blue eyes, though not at all sleepy-looking in expression, have yet a half-shut appearance, from the extreme fulness of the upper lids. Her mouth is wide and has a slightly sarcastic curl of the lip, and she has the self-possessed air of one much used to society.

"Aunt Aggy," cried Tom, tossing the baby into its mother's lap, "McBriar is ahead in the race. I thought Volney's gift would please Kate, especially as she is rather partial to Mr. Paul already; it is such a 'cute little—— I'd nearly let the cat out of the bag! But the doctor's bangs the Jews, and takes the rag off the bush. Won't Kate stare! Oh my!"

"What is it?"

"It is a—— Oh-no-I-never-mention-it. I'm sworn to secrecy."

"Tell me the color, the size."

"The color is orange; size not less than a hundred feet."

"Oh, pshaw!" said Tom's aunt.

"No, not a cushaw, nor yet Cinderella's pumpkin. But here comes Kate herself, with Winny on one arm and leading Clay, much against his will, it seems."

"Mrs. Ashbur," exclaimed the young lady, as soon as she could recover her breath after putting Winny on her feet and emptying a dozen oranges from her own apron, "if you do not keep a better watch over this boy of yours, he will be the death of little Winny yet. I found them at the foot of our hill, Clay mounted on Mrs. Silvers's goat, poor Nanny's horns decorated with a couple of oranges, and Winny actually tied by her sash to the tail of the goat, while around on the ground were scattered nearly a bushel of oranges. Clay announced himself as Alexander on Bucephalus, and Winny as the

captive of his spear. The oranges, I suppose, represented the worlds he had conquered."

"No, they didn't, neither!" said the captured conqueror. "We had been playing snow-ball with them before I was turned into Alexander."

"Clay," said his mother, "*what* do you mean by wearing your father's epaulette on your head and dragging his sword about in the dust? Here, Cindy," to the nurse, "take this young pig and give him a bath."

"See what mischief you have done, Cousin Kate," said Tom. "You have demolished the constellation Capricornus, and Aquarius is now in the ascendant."

"But the worst of it is this wicked waste of oranges; you don't seem to think of that, Mrs. Ashbur. I never had as many as I could eat in my life until I came to Texas."

"You may have as many as you can shake a stick at here,—a bushel for fifty cents. Indeed, it is the only fruit we have except figs; not half so good as apples, which we cannot get for love or money," said Tom.

"We would gladly exchange oranges for apples, for they can be made into neither pies, puddings, nor dumplings," said Mrs. Ashbur, "and I am often at my wits' end to get up something for a dessert. Remain here, Kate, until I take Winny home; and if the milk-man comes, don't let him give you goat's milk."

Not long after Mrs. Ashbur had left, a Mexican,

carrying a tall earthenware jar on his head and another on his right arm, came to the door.

"*Señora! Quiere V. leche de cabra ó leche de vaca?*" said he.

"Which is which, Tom?" asked Miss Comerford, at a loss.

"I don't know, but I'll find out. *Muchacho* (that is Spanish for boy), is this," touching the jar on the man's head, "mo-oo *leche* or ba-aa *leche?*"

"*Quien sabe!*" exclaimed the astonished Mexican.

"I take *leche de cabra*," said Kate, laughing; "that sounds most like cow's milk."

But Mrs. Ashbur on her return pronounced it goat's milk, and to Miss Comerford's question of why it would not answer as well said that if boiled when quite fresh it would do for coffee, but after standing a while it became strong and the taste was not agreeable.

"Agreeable! that is putting it mildly," said Tom. "Do you remember the delicious custard you once made of it, Aunt Aggy? It tasted something as old boots and mice smell, Kate. Whew! after one mouthful of that delicacy Uncle George and I had to retire hastily from the table—to meditate."

CHAPTER II.

On the morrow the party for Don Santiago's hacienda got off in good time. Volney managed to secure a seat by Miss Comerford in the small ambulance, in which Mrs. Ashbur and young Heron occupied the front seat, Tom driving.

"Now, Cousin Kate," began that young gentleman, "you admire Mexican fashions so much, their bows and hand-kissings, and all that, what style of driving will you have to-day, American or Mexican?"

"Well, as nothing could be worse than your usual style of handling the reins, I choose the Mexican."

They were at the top of a pretty steep hill. Tom called to two soldiers on horseback who formed part of the escort: "Jump off and hold back these mules until I cry *let go!*"

Away rattled the ambulance, the speed of the mules checked by the two soldiers running at their sides and swinging on to their bridles for dear life. "Let go!" yelled the driver when half-way down; and down flew mules and wagon with such an impetus as served to take them half-way up the next hill.

Kate screamed and fell forward on Heron's shoulders. Lieutenant Volney laughed and rescued her. Mrs. Ashbur darted forward as if minded to take a seat on one of the mules, but as the upward motion began fell back with some emphasis into her neph-

ew's lap. She insisted that the American manner of driving should be adopted, and that no Mexican in his senses ever drove in *that* way.

But Volney supported Heron in his assertion that this was their exact style of driving down hill [and this is a fact].

So they kept on over all that very hilly road, Tom declaring he was no good at translating Spanish into English, and must continue to drive in pure Castilian. Mrs. Ashbur said *she* should be satisfied if they were not translated into a better world before their journey's end. Tom and Kate liked the fun, and Volney was only too happy to have his joints dislocated in such pleasant company.

Dr. McBriar, Captain Rubenstein, and Lieutenant Hawthorn, who kept pace with the ambulances on horseback, were consumed with envy and jealousy at Volney's good luck.

In the second and larger ambulance, following at a more reasonable pace, were seated Mrs. Silvers, Mrs. Duval, Captain Ashbur, and Lieutenants Francisco and Waters, the latter driving.

On the way the flowers looked so tempting that Miss Comerford expressed a desire for a Texas tulip (cactus-blossom).

The three gentlemen on horseback immediately dismounted, intent on securing for the fair lady of their three hearts one of the thorn-beset blossoms, while the two ambulances halted to watch progress and to give advice.

"Ah, Mr. Waters," sighed Mrs. Duval in her die-

away voice, "I should be inexpressibly delighted to secure one of those magnificent ferns,—the maiden's hair, is it not?"

"Will not this snake-cactus do as well, Mrs. Duval?" asked Heron, striking at one with his whip-lash. "This is probably a stray tress of Medusa's hair. How will that answer for your infernery?"

"You will long for a glance from Medusa to petrify you into insensibility if you touch it," exclaimed Rubenstein, stamping, and blowing on his fingers, which were smarting from the sting of the nettles, that render the gathering of these flowers a feat only possible to the initiated.

Dr. McBriar had, meanwhile, pierced the calyx of the blossom with a pointed stick, which he desired Hawthorn to hold while he deftly proceeded by first trimming off the thorns with his penknife and then cutting the flower from its parent leaf, for there is no stem.

He was in the act of presenting it to Miss Comerford with his blandest grin, when, chancing to step on the long piece of snake-cactus cut off by Tom's whip, the other end flew up against his knee. His summer trousers formed no protection from the nettles, and the stinging pain caused him to drop the hardly-won blossom. In a moment Hawthorn snatched and presented the prize.

"If that is not a cool piece of impudence, I am no judge of the article!" said the discomfited surgeon.

But Miss Comerford's thanks and condolences soon restored his good humor.

Another mile brought them to the mansion of Señor Mendoza; but before reaching the house they passed, at the foot of the hill on which stood the *casa grande*, the huts of the *peones*, or laborers, on the estate. These huts, which stood in compact rows on either side the road, might be designated as vertical log cabins, — that is, the small logs of which the walls were built stood upright instead of being laid horizontally. The roofs, not over eight or ten feet from the ground, were nearly flat, and formed of a thatch of twigs and mortar, the floors, also of mortar well pounded, being literally *ground* floors. The open doors served for windows as well, the latter being dispensed with, as were also chimneys. The little cooking necessary for these frugal people was done in bake-ovens built outside.

The women were seen seated on the floor, some sewing, and others engaged in the interesting pastime of pursuing Goldsmith's animated nature amid the black thatch on the heads of their bronze-colored *niños*. In this region this branch of entomology is studied without disguise.

The cottages, though almost destitute of furniture, usually boasted of a neat and tasty bed ornamented by a pyramid of pillows, the first a long narrow one, then shorter and shorter, until the top one was only fit for the head of a baby, the cases handsomely wrought in open stitch.

The outer walls of the cabins were gayly festooned with strings of red pepper, and some of the roofs of

these peasant dwellings were covered with the fragrant onion.

Swarms of handsome bronze *muchachitos* (little boys), quite innocent of drapery, scampered around amid the kids and chickens.

The *casa* of Don Santiago, a large flat-roofed building of *adobes*, had no enclosed yard in front, no grass-plot, nothing but sand, in which stood a few giant *Spanish bayonets* and maguey-plants like sentinels each side of the wide carriage door-way, which formed the front entrance and led to the inner court.

Passing through this carriage-house, or *entresol*, our party entered the court, where they were hospitably welcomed by the ladies and children of the family, with low courtesies to the gentlemen and the most graceful of embraces for the ladies.

While the *muchachos* are taking the horses and mules around to the *corral*, we may take a view of the inner court, into which all the doors of the house open. In one corner stood a gnarled old fig-tree; in the centre an evergreen called the *sauco* (or elder-tree), having rich dark foliage and clusters of white blossoms like our elder-bush. There were also, here and there, elevated flower-beds, standing over three feet above the level of the yard, in which bloomed many familiar garden-flowers, and others which were unknown to our Americans of the North, as the Mexicans term people of the United States. One flower, resembling the single pink, was remarkable for its peculiar fragrance, somewhat like cologne; these were called *tortones*.

The brick walls of these flower-tables were hung with Madeira and other vines, and the flowers were out of reach of the chickens and dogs, both quite at home in the court.

Turning to the left after entering the court, the first door led into the *sala grande*, an immense, long room, around which ran a cushioned seat, formed, indeed, by a projection of the wall itself. The walls were whitewashed, and, in lieu of tapestry, a width of buff calico had been tacked thereon, running around the room above the stationary divan, and serving as a more becoming background than the white wall itself for the heads of the señoritas as they rested from the fatigue of the dance.

The ceiling was very high, the house having but one story, and formed of a species of cane or bamboo work in fanciful patterns. The walls, over three feet in thickness, effectually excluded all heat, and the sudden change from the glaring sunlight was most refreshing.

Passing through the *sala grande*, the guests were ushered into a small apartment, where the ladies laid off their bonnets, and immediately chocolate, served in tiny cups, was presented to the visitors.

"How vastly superior is this inimitable chocolate to ours!" exclaimed Mrs. Duval. "If we only possessed a sufficiently comprehensive knowledge of the Spanish language to communicate efficiently with the señoritas, I should desire to make some inquiries into the culinary process necessary to produce a beverage so exquisitely grateful to the taste."

"Mr. Hawthorn is our interpreter," said Mrs. Silvers. "Mr. Hawthorn, step here if you please; Mrs. Duval wants to know how to make chocolate." Then, in a lower tone, "I will translate her into plain English, and you can then put it into a Spanish dress."

Mr. Hawthorn, in better Spanish than is usually heard on the frontier, made the speech of the ladies mutually intelligible, and the señora was delighted to furnish the recipe, and she also insisted that her guests should take home with them some cakes of the chocolate. The Mexican chocolate differs from the French in having almonds and spices, as well as sugar, mixed with the ground cacao-bean.

Don Santiago Mendoza was absent, the *señoritas* regretted to say, on a trip to the city of Zacatecas, in Mexico, from whence he procured his annual supply of groceries and dry-goods for his "store"; for each proprietor of a *hacienda* is also a merchant to the extent of furnishing his *peones* with all they need. But the eldest son of the house, Pedro Antonio, and his brother Juan, lively, dark lads of ten and twelve, assumed their father's place as host with much dignity.

Señora Mendoza and her grown daughters, Bernancia and Dolores, were very dark of complexion, with good figures, but not at all handsome. The younger children, about a dozen in number, were all pretty.

Miss Comerford began playing with the baby, and, being instructed by Hawthorn, said, "*Como se llama V.?*" ["What is your name?"]

"*Conchita, bonita señora,*" responded the *nina*, greatly to the surprise of all.

"Is it possible so young a child can speak?" cried Mrs. Ashbur. "Why, it cannot be over seven or eight months old."

On hearing the interpretation the mother replied that "the *nina* had but seven months, but the child was not unusually forward in speaking." The Spanish tongue is so melodious and easy of pronunciation that it does not take a Mexican baby a whole year (as is the case with ours) to make up its mind to attack the difficulties of its native speech.

To reach the dining-room, which was on the side of the court, at right angles with the *sala grande*, the company must again cross the court-yard. On entering the *comedor*, or *salle-a-manger*, before taking seats at the long table, each member of the family, to the smallest child, made the sign of the cross, while the mother asked a blessing. Then, while musicians under the windows made music, monotonous but sweet, on the small Mexican harps, the hungry guests, served by three or four *muchachos*, proceeded to dispatch the bountiful meal.

After soup they partook of kid roasted whole, chicken stewed in rice, broiled squabs, and the celebrated national dish *olla podrida.* This dish is so unique as to merit a description: In the middle of a large, flat dish a good-sized piece of boiled beef reposed, surrounded—as a continent by its adjacent islands, but minus the sea of gravy—by a few whole onions, a few apples, as many tomatoes and figs, all

boiled whole, and a cabbage-head cut into quarters. In serving, a slice of the continent and a small piece of each island was allotted to each guest. And very good, too, is the *olla podrida*, as we can testify.

Observing the Mexican ladies eating green *chile* (red pepper cooked in its green stage), Mrs. Duval, desirous of becoming *au fait* in all the customs of the country, took a good mouthful, and was affected to tears.

"If this is chilly," remarked Lieutenant Waters, under his breath,—for he had been trying the same experiment,—"what may be called hot in this country?"

"You will probably be considered a Hottentot, Mr. Waters, if you perforate that beautifully wrought napkin with your teeth while cooling your mouth," said Mrs. Ashbur, who sat next him.

Both table-cloth and napkins were of the finest linen, bordered with delicate needle-work in *hem-stitch.*

Excellent port wine appeared with the dessert, also baskets of fresh figs and oranges. One very palatable dish was of mince-meat, seasoned as we have it for mince-pies, with the addition of almonds; in place of pastry a spoonful of the mince-meat is twisted up in the white inner husks of corn and fried in lard; the little bundles look, for all the world, like those fancy bon-bons that go off with a pop when you pull them.

After dinner, coffee and *cigaritas* were handed to ladies as well as gentlemen. No *señorita* is ever

without her cigarita-case. The one used by Señora Mendoza was of pure gold, very like a card-case in form, and exquisitely wrought; it had been brought from the city of Mexico.

Hawthorn and McBriar paid many compliments to the young ladies, and their brother-officers vowed to learn the language in self-defence, as they felt certain that all of their eloquent speeches came to grief in the translation.

With many hopes of another visit, invitations to Knocktin Barracks, cordial embraces, and *adioses*, the Knocktin party were at length *en route* homeward.

After much persuasion, young Heron, insisting that he had promised the colonel to keep an eye on Cousin Kate, was induced to yield his seat to Captain Rubenstein.

"Nonsense, Tom! Am I not here to matronize Kate?" said his aunt.

"Yes, but who is to patronize Volney? Be careful of your shoulders, sir," to Rubenstein as that spry little gentleman lightly sprang into the wagon and took the reins; "my cousin does not hold back well going down hill."

"Waters," said Hawthorn, riding alongside the other ambulance, "don't you think Rubenstein, having had his day, should be satisfied to look on and let us bachelors have a chance now?"

"Certainly; but as for me, Volney has stolen a march on me by making me his confidant. He is desperately in earnest."

"So you, being Damon to his Pythias, cannot in-

terfere," remarked Captain Ashbur. "However, you may console yourself; not a ghost of a chance would you stand, or Volney either, for that matter. The colonel vows that no daughter of his shall ever marry into the army. You know he attributes the early death of Miss Kate's mother to the hardships of frontier life."

"Captain Rubenstein is aware of this prejudice," said Mrs. Silvers, "and has adroitly informed me, in presence of Colonel Comerford, that he should in a few years retire from the service, having a very comfortable fortune independent of his pay."

"Cousin Kate would not have him," cried Heron, who had approached, seated on the horse of the gentleman they were canvassing. "She says he is too small and frisky, and his long moustaches give him the appearance of a *walrus*. If Kate can't have the first fruits of the heart, she is not the girl to put up with the second crop. Which means her wedding-cake must be made of the white flour of the affections, not of the seconds."

"Hold your tongue, Tom! Your mixed metaphors put my teeth on edge. Three or four years hence will be time enough to think of wedding-cake for Miss Comerford. I should think," continued Mrs. Silvers, as Lieutenant Hawthorn rode on to overtake the other ambulance, "that Mr. Hawthorn stood the best chance of pleasing her; he is decidedly the handsomest and best-educated man in the regiment, though he has so little to say for himself."

"Thank you for nothing, Mrs. Silvers," laughed

Jack Waters, the best-natured man in the regiment; then added, in his friend's interest, "Volney is also good-looking, sings well, dances to perfection, and, if a trifle wild at times, he has not a bit of harm in him."

"But is as poor as a church-mouse, dependent on his pay, and possessed of precious little stability of character, I fancy," said Captain Ashbur.

On coming in sight of Knocktin an impromptu race was inaugurated between the handsome Hawthorn and the grim surgeon, each wishing to arrive first at the stopping-place and have the honor of assisting pretty Kate to alight.

Hawthorn's horse was the fleeter, but the canny Scot, determined to gain by foul means if not by fair, shouted in Spanish at the top of his voice to a Mexican who happened to be passing with a lasso on his arm: "Stop that runaway horse! Save my friend, and you shall have five dollars!" pointing to the horseman in advance.

That *greaser* would have lassoed the President of the United States for half the sum. The ready lasso flew and fell; the astounded horse nearly fell from the abrupt check, and not even the rider's excellent horsemanship availed. Like the lasso, he also flew (over the horse's head) and fell.

Seeing that he did not immediately arise, but lay like one dead, humanity got the better of love, and the repentant surgeon dismounted and hastened to the rescue. Now, you must understand that all this occurred in view of the rest of the party, who had

hurried forward. What these strange doings meant no one could tell; not horse-stealing, for the Mexican had recovered his lasso and run away, leaving the horse behind him. The next scene was not calculated to abate their surprise. Just as McBriar, leaning over his prostrate rival, seemed to be feeling his pulse, up sprang Hawthorn, overturning the stout doctor by a vigorous push, jumped upon the surgeon's horse, which was at hand, then whistling to his own, which galloped after him, made all speed for home.

Tom, laughing until he cried, offered his horse to McBriar, but that gentleman preferred to walk the short distance remaining. He wished to collect his thoughts, and was now repenting himself of his former repentance; his softness of heart had lost the advantage so cunningly won.

Mr. Hawthorn had the felicity of holding the gloved hands of the colonel's blue-eyed daughter for one moment as she was assisted from the high ambulance, and also had the fun of seeing Rubenstein and Volney embrace each other in their hurry to anticipate him.

CHAPTER III.

MISS KATE'S birthday gifts awaited her on her return home. Tom and his aunt, with Master Clay, went up to the house on the hill to share her surprise. Colonel Comerford informed his daughter that the Mexican *capitan* had brought his present in person, and regretted not finding her at home.

"My back is almost broken," remarked the corpulent colonel, "with the many bows I had to make. In taking leave on reaching the door he bowed profoundly; on the steps of the veranda he made a second obeisance; half-way down the hill he turned for another bow; at the foot came bow the fourth, and several others followed before I lost sight of him. I felt much like a nodding mandarin myself.

"Here is Jack Waters's gift, as handsome as himself," continued the colonel, leading forth an armadillo so gentle that it would feed from one's hand.

"A pig with a shell on him!" cried Clay Ashbur, dancing about. "I hope Cousin Kate will be afraid of him and give him to me. I would name him turtle-pig." But Kate was delighted with a pet so unique.

Hawthorn's present was a large gray parrot with a red top-knot.

"And it talks Spanish, Cousin Kate," said Clay. "It can say *buenos dias* and *vamos*, and——"

"I'll make you *walk* Spanish if you interrupt the proceedings of this court again," said Tom. "Is not this handsome, though?" holding up a basket shaped like a vase, woven of grass and ornamented with birds and flowers in brilliant colors.

"And what beautiful needle-work on this linen napkin which covers it!" said Miss Comerford, peeping into the basket. "What can these be?—strawberries?"

"Strawberries are unknown in this vicinity," said her father. "This is the fruit of a species of cactus. Each one of these berries is furnished with a skin covered with nettles; the skins have been removed, leaving, as you see, a fruit like a white strawberry, and of much the same flavor."

All pronounced the berries delicious; but whether the flavor of the note found lurking in the bottom of the basket suited Miss Kate's taste quite so well is doubtful. She made a wry face over it, and in holding it too near the lighted candle, which had now been brought in to dispel the twilight, being of inflammable stuff, it somehow caught and was half consumed before Tom could rescue it.

"Don't cry, Kate," said Tom, in his most affectionate tone. "Rubenstein will write you another when I tell him of this sad mishap. He will express himself in rhyme next time:

> "'McBriar may lasso and Hawthorn may dash,
> But Katie she smiles on my walrus mustache.'

"This is the doctor's present," continued Tom. "I

told him how fond you were of the study of natural history, and see, he has deprived himself of the gem of his collection. Says no second specimen can be procured of this rare size."

Here he offered his cousin a glass jar containing an orange-colored centipede at least six inches long.

"Mercy!" screamed Kate, recoiling. "The man must have taken leave of his senses. Surely he never sent me such a monster!"

"Yes, you ungrateful girl, and you must at least pretend to be pleased. The old gentleman has made a great sacrifice, I do assure you."

"Clay, you may present this," said Colonel Comerford, coming from the next room with something alive in his handkerchief.

"Oh, give it to me, cousin!" cried Clay, holding fast what he had received. "The darling little fairy, baby dog!"

And truly there exists no other such liliputian specimen of the canine race as the Chihuahua dog. This one, though fully grown, could stand at ease on a lady's hand. The hair, of a bronze-brown, was short and glossy, and the shape exactly that of a miniature greyhound.

"I declare, it is like a bronze paper-weight," said Mrs. Ashbur; "and its eyes are like a gazelle's, so large and soft. What is this on the silver collar? 'K. C., from P. V.'"

"Oh, you little darling! was ever anything so sweet?" This from Miss Kate, as she hugged the tiny creature.

"Which, P. V. or the doggee?" whispered Heron.

"Have you forgotten your Mexican present, daughter?" asked the colonel, not over-pleased at these raptures over Volney's gift. "I am afraid it is costly, despite my prohibition. However, the señor assured me it was given as a mere curiosity,—by no means as an article of dress. It has been handed down in his family for some centuries,—at least, so he said."

Opening a shallow sandal-wood box, in which was found the donor's card, *Señor Bolzones y de Miguel*, Kate drew forth a heavy silk *rebosa*, the ground of delicate buff, embroidered in colors, in a succession of pictures representing ladies playing on guitars, cavaliers dancing, birds, flowers, bull-fights, and an endless variety of fantastic figures, for the scarf or *rebosa* was a yard in width and about three in length.

"This is, indeed, an invaluable curiosity, Kate, and so antique; but it is not at all like the *rebosas* worn at the present day, which are invariably in subdued colors and without embroidery. I have a thread one which is about dust color," said Mrs. Ashbur. "But we must say *buenas noches*, Clay, and depart; otherwise both big George and little George will think we are lost. I forgot to leave word that we were coming to Mount Olympus, as Dr. McBriar in one of his odes to Kate styles this hill. Come, Tom."

"*Adios*, Cousin Kate," said Tom,—"Cousin *Hebe* I should say, I suppose, as you are neither Minerva nor Venus. The armadillo and little Chihuahua will, of course, be good friends; but beware how you let Hawthorn's parrot come within reach of Paul's dog.

And, O Hebe, see that you treasure the gift of Esculapius. Surely the goddess of health and the health-giver should be kindred souls. Farewell, colonel," touching his hat to Kate's father, adding in a whisper as he went down the steps from the veranda with his aunt, "Might I say Jove?"

The Jupiter of the Knocktin Olympus was revolving in his mind, while listening to Heron's nonsense, the propriety of placing Miss Hebe where not even Pelion piled on top of Ossa would suffice to reach her.

A week later there arrived in the garrison Pedro and Juan Mendoza, mounted on a *burro* (a small donkey) not much larger than a big dog, but with ears *muy grande.* The boys brought, with the compliments of their mother, a jar of *átole* for Mrs. Francisco, who had not been well enough to drive with the other ladies to the *hacienda.* The *átole* proved to be a most palatable drink, made of boiled Indian corn, and was about the consistence of custard, seasoned with sugar, lemon-juice, and nutmeg.

"Here is something the señora has sent to you, Agnes," said Captain Ashbur to his wife, handing a covered basket to that lady, as she and Miss Comerford (who spent much of her time with Tom's aunt) were sitting together in the bed-room. "*Tortillas*, I believe."

"Kate, will you please take them out of the basket? I cannot disturb the baby just now," said Mrs. Ashbur, who held the sleeping child on her lap.

"Oh, excuse me, Mrs. Ashbur; I am afraid," said

the young lady, getting as far from the proffered basket as possible.

"Of what, in the name of common sense?" asked Captain Ashbur. "I did not say torpedoes. *Tortillas.*"

"And that is worse; I dare not touch them."

"Now, that is mere prejudice," replied Mrs. Ashbur. "To be sure, they are not very inviting to the eye, being of a dingy hue, but that is owing to the color of the corn, and they are really delicious."

"Not to eat?" exclaimed Kate, horrified. "I have heard of locusts as an article of diet, but great hairy spiders——"

"By all that's funny, if she is not thinking of *tarantulas!*" and Captain Ashbur shouted with laughter. "*Tortillas*, my child, are a kind of griddle-cakes, made of corn, not ground, but boiled on the ear, and then reduced to a pulp by being rubbed up and down on a stone concern grooved or shaped like a washboard, and called a *metate. Entiende V.?* which meaneth, *do you understand?*"

"See!" said Mrs. Ashbur, taking the cakes out of the basket. "Toasted and buttered hot, it is the best bread I ever ate. But I shall have to toast them myself, for our cook is so jealous of any cookery not her own that she will take pleasure in scorching them."

"I am both enlightened and relieved," said Kate; "but after the doctor's centipede I am timid. Please don't tell Tom Heron, or I shall never hear the last of it."

"Speak of the what's-his-name and here he is,"

said Tom's uncle, as that young man entered the front door without the ceremony of a knock.

"My name is nothing worse than *Mercury*, I thank you," responded Mr. Tom. "Kate, I am glad to find you here; it will save me the fatigue of climbing the hill to deliver your invitation. The wings on my heels are somewhat out of order. What do you say to a dance across the river,—a regular, tiptop Mexican *baile?* Did you ever see anything so stylish as these tickets printed on white satin and bordered with a ruffle of yellow ribbon?"

"A *quilling*, not a ruffle, Tom," objected his cousin, as she examined the pretty satin card with its Spanish legend.

"Every one is going, of course, except the officer of the day. Who will that unhappy mortal be, I wonder, Uncle George? Let me see: it is twelve days from this time. Kate, don't you hope it may not be Volney? I love my love with a V, because he is versatile."

"I hate my cousin with a *T*, because he is——" began Kate.

"A *tarantula;* hey, Miss Kate?" laughed Captain Ashbur.

"Remember your promise," cried the young girl, snatching up her hat. "*Adios.* Come up, to-morrow, Mrs. Ashbur, and see if my blue *crêpe* lisse dress will do for the *baile.*"

It was early one morning not many days after this, and Mrs. Ashbur, in a low chair, sat busily sewing, rocking the baby in his basket cradle with one foot,

and giving an animated description of a Mexican bull-fight to Miss Comerford, who, seated on the cool green-and-white matting, was blowing soap-bubbles with Clay and Winny, while through the open doors there floated in every now and then from the back yard this refrain: "Oh, carry me back to ole Virginny—to ole Virgin-i-ah's sho'." For old Phebe and Cindy, the baby's nurse, were doing up the week's washing,—that is, they were industriously singing, and accompanying themselves in a desultory manner with an occasional touch on the wash-board.

No wonder the rap at the door had not been noticed, and Lieutenant Volney's presence was first announced by his salutation of "*Buenos dias, señoras!*"

Miss Comerford sprang to her feet, blushing violently; for no good reason, as sitting on the floor is nothing to blush for.

"If you are not particularly engaged this morning, Mrs. Ashbur, Mrs. Duval begs you will come over immediately. Her cook has taken French leave—she was married last evening to Corporal Wells—and, her place being supplied by a Mexican who knows never a word of English, Mrs. Duval wants your assistance as interpreter, as you know a little Spanish. Otherwise, she cannot make any preparations for the party promised us to-morrow night. Now do go, that is a clever lady; don't let our party fall through. You are not particularly engaged now, are you?"

"Not much engaged! I am busy with both hands and one foot."

"And one tongue; I can testify to the last," interpolated a voice from the back room, where Captain Ashbur had been for some time trying to accomplish some writing.

"Just run over, Mrs. Ashbur, that's a *dear* lady. I'll rock the cradle, and Miss Comerford will finish your sewing," urged the persistent Volney.

"Aunt Aggy, I say!" cried young Heron, stepping in, fanning himself with his hat; "Mrs. Silvers says bring your sewing over, and she will fit your button-holes while you cut and work her dress,—the one to be worn to the *baile*."

"Do you really make your own dresses, Mrs. Ashbur?" inquired Kate.

"Yes; I should be in a sorry fix if I could not. I find my talent for cutting and fitting of more use than much I learned at school. I advise you, Kate, to leave off some of the useless *ologies*, of which you get but smattering, and take a few lessons in dress-making."

"It seems you are in demand on the east side to-day, Mrs. Ashbur; but first come first served. Help Mrs. Duval this morning; Mrs. Silvers and the button-holes can wait. You know we *must* have that dance," entreated Volney. "Say to Mrs. Duval I'll drop in after drill is over and beat the whites of the eggs for her cake myself. I've often done it for my mother."

"Agnes, call in Cindy to rock the cradle; Phebe can carry herself back to old Virginny without assistance, and the washing will get done somehow,

sooner or later. What difference will a day make?" said the gentleman of the house, appearing at the inner door in his shirt-sleeves. "And Miss Kate and Volney will have to continue that entertaining bull-fight *sotto voce;* I have these vouchers to make out, and have wasted enough time already. That confounded animal of yours, Mrs. Ashbur, has been scampering over my paper for the last half-hour. And I can't have the door shut this blasted hot weather."

"I will take the children up with me to spend the day, Mrs. Ashbur; you will be detained all day on the other side," remarked Kate. "Come, Winny; let us go in and ask mamma."

Mrs. Ashbur consented to this arrangement, advising Kate to sit a while with Mrs. Francisco, who enjoyed a little social chat in the morning.

"I'll go in with you, Miss Kate," said Mr. Volney. "I have a most amusing story to relate, and Francisco condescendingly informed me the other day that his wife enjoyed my nonsense now and then."

"I do not think we should visit the sick with such frivolous intentions," said the young lady, severely. "So you had better——"

"Give her an impressive discourse on practical piety? The 'rise and progress of religion in the soul,' as depicted in my eloquently devotional style, would take you to the seventh heaven. I am equal to any length of 'Pilgrim's Progress,' 'Paradise Lost,' James's novels, Burton's 'Anatomy of Melancholy.' For instance: Now is the winter of our discontent

made glorious summer by man's first disobedience, and the fruit which turneth to ashes in the mouth and like an enemy stealeth away your brains, Thomas, my friend, if you happen to have any on hand."

"I will follow up that enlivening discourse with 'Hark! from the tombs a doleful sound,'" sang Tom, through his nose, as the three, followed by the children, went in next door to cheer up Mrs. Francisco.

"When Mrs. Francisco is tired of us, I will go up with you and the children, Miss Kate. Your veranda will be a fine place for blowing soap-bubbles," said Mr. Volney.

Judging from the length of time spent in that delectable amusement, Tom—who in passing an hour later spied the merry party on the veranda, still amusing themselves blowing bubbles—surmised that Cupid was sending up a few of the airy nothings on his own account. "Never you mind, Mr. Paul; that big bubble of yours, which you fancy glowing with all the colors of Hope's rainbow, will pretty soon be exploded by a breath from the hard-hearted colonel, leaving a bad taste in your mouth," soliloquized Tom.

CHAPTER IV.

On consultation, it was decided by the ladies that an entertainment with the usual refreshments was, under the circumstances, out of the question. The Mexican cook knew no more of cake-making than he did of English. Mr. Silvers's suggestion that a candy-pulling be substituted met with unanimous approbation.

When dancing was mentioned, during the call Captain and Mrs. Ashbur were making at Mrs. Francisco's to say they would take charge of little Winny, who also had an invitation to the candy-pulling, Mrs. Francisco remarked that she could not imagine how so large a party could find room to dance in so small a space.

"Oh, you have not been across the way for some time," said Captain Ashbur, "and know nothing of the changes. Why, my dear madam, Duval has had folding-doors put between their rooms at his own expense; I believe he would add a second story if his wife wished it."

"When we dance there Mrs. Duval takes down her bedstead, and we have the use of both rooms, and even dance on the front porch. Mrs. Silvers lends the ladies the use of her front room as a dressing-chamber," said Mrs. Ashbur.

Mr. Volney had the felicity of walking down the

hill and over the few yards farther which brought them to Mrs. Duval's door by the side of Miss Kate —and her father. The colonel stalked along like a shepherd-dog protecting a lamb from the wolf in sheep's clothing, Volney fervently wishing he would stumble and roll down the hill for his pains, while mischievous Kate was highly diverted by the colonel's precaution and Volney's disgust.

The company assembled were first treated to some enchanting music,—Mrs. Duval at the piano, accompanied by Rubinstein on the violin, Waters with his flute, and Hawthorn's guitar.

Captain Rubinstein's German, music-loving soul was so absorbed in the melody that even Miss Kate was for the time forgotten, greatly to the satisfaction of her other adorers.

Then Mrs. Duval sang "Auld Robin Grey" so pathetically as to bring tears to the eyes of more than one of her audience.

"Why does Mr. Hawthorn retain his sword this evening and wear his sash drawn over his shoulder?" inquired Kate, in a low tone, of her cousin Tom. "He looks as if posturing for a troubadour or a sentimental brigand, though I never imagined a brigand with blue eyes. Is he not a little vain of his beauty?"

"Oh, you innocent! know you not that the *officer of the day* always wears his sash in that fashion, and that it is against regulations to lay aside his sword? Hawthorn is not a man to do things for effect."

After a few sets were danced, it was proposed to

vary the amusements by a charade, or rather by a species of rebus or acted proverb.

Those who intended to take part in the pantomime retired to the back room, and the folding-doors were closed.

"See what a handsome *cornette* I have made of this newspaper," said Kate Comerford, when the proverb, or quotation, had been chosen and the different parts assigned. "I represent a Sister of Charity."

"Indeed, no," objected Mrs. Silvers; "a Sister of Charity is not precisely a nun, and you, Kate, are to be a *nun*."

"Where is your *rouge*, Mrs. Duval?" asked Jack Waters. "I want a lot of it for war-paint."

"Mr. Waters," said that lady, "I wish you to understand that the roses which are visible on my cheeks are laid on simply by 'Nature's cunning hand.' I never indulge in borrowed hues."

"Oh, excuse my ignorance; I thought all fashionable ladies rouged. A little brick-dust will answer just as well."

"Use some of this blackberry jam, Mr. Waters," said Gustavus Duval, a boy of seven, offering a small jar. "Alcy and me use it for paint."

The jam was declined with thanks, and a substitute was found.

After the usual confusion, blunders, and laughing incident to impromptu theatricals, the curtain rose—that is, the doors flew back—and Scene First was presented. Lovely Kate Comerford, attired in the costume of a nun, with a long white veil over her head,

is discovered kneeling, with hands clasped and eyes raised to heaven.

Doors close; soon reopen, and show Scene No. 2. Four children are having a game of ball. Enter Mrs. Silvers's goat (which has been carefully trained). Clay flourishes his bat and shoves Winny behind him, while Alcy and Gus Duval take to their heels around the room, the goat in full chase. Alcy climbs a tree (commonly called a chair) and the goat butts over Gustavus, who lies sprawling on the floor, when curtain falls.

No one is to mention the word he imagines each scene to shadow forth until the whole has been represented; so all is silence while the Third Scene is acted. Lieutenant Waters, in guise of an Indian chief in full war-paint, horned head-gear, and enormous ear-rings of the purest tin, comes on with an unearthly war-whoop and a grand flourish of his tomahawk.

The party behind the scenes, as well as the guessers, were quite unprepared for the war-whoop (which was an inspiration of the moment) and considerably startled by the outlandish yell.

It is now announced that in the Fourth Scene the word is somewhat hidden,—the pronunciation not very exact.

As the curtain rises the fife and drum are heard, and a company of soldiers march on the stage, each man having a large D on his hat. One of the soldiers (who proves to be Major Silvers, with the tails of his coat tucked under to form a jacket) complains

that he did not mean to 'list, but was took advantage of by the recruiting-officer, and he vows by Sint Pathrick he won't serve,—"can't lave his poor widowed wife and orphan childer."

"Faith, Mick, an' ye'll have to serve for five blissed year!" cries Mrs. Silvers, who, in Irish costume, represents his indignant wife, with four ragged children hanging around her. "And right it serves you for making a drunken baste of yersilf till ye haven't the full of a thimble of sinse lift to your noddle." Curtain falls.

Scene Fifth and last. Two rows of chairs stand facing each other, leaving a narrow space between. Clay Ashbur, perched on a high chair at the end of the rows, cracks his whip and sings out "g'lang!" The rest of the company in hats and bonnets—some carrying market-baskets—every now and then signal the driver, who turns the brake. They enter and seat themselves. Gustavus Duval, as conductor, then passes between them collecting the fare. Curtain falls for last time.

Now there ensues a confusion of tongues and of haphazard guesses. The company who are to solve the enigma consult in groups. Some one is heard to suggest that the first word may be "prayer, vow, nun, veil."

"I have it," shouts Dr. McBriar: "*The valley of the shadow of death.* The first scene gives you the *veil:* the second, *lie*,—that boy did lie on the ground, —which makes *valley*."

"But how does that Indian represent *of the*

shadow?" interrupted Colonel Comerford. "A mighty substantial shadow, I should say."

"He is the materialization of the shadow of death. You know coming events cast their shadows before," rejoined McBriar, determined to stand by his own interpretation.

"Certainly, after the coming of that horned event, our shadows would be considerably less," said Mrs. Ashbur. "But you have not a shadow of a chance, Doctor, your explanation falls short by two whole scenes: there is the street-car and there are the soldiers unaccounted for."

"Here is the proper way to get the clue," said Tom Heron: 1st. veil, pray, maid, vow, nun. 2d. Goat, play, butt, ball, bat, down. 3d. Indian, whoop, war, chief, savage. 4th. Recruit, drill, enlist, company, etc. 5th. 'Bus, car, fare, ticket, ride."

"You pays your money and you takes your choice," sang out the shrill voice of Alcibiades Duval.

"Here it is in a nutshell," said Captain Rubenstein: "*A maid whom there was none to praise, and very few to love.* Scene First is surely a maid who there was *nun.*"

"Very ingenious; but how do you tack on the next scene?" inquired Captain Francisco.

"To praise—to praise. I believe I must give it up," admitted Rubenstein.

"He may just as well give up that maid *sune* as *syne*," remarked Volney, aside to his friend Waters.

"I should say that the D on the soldiers' caps had some signification," said Mrs. Ashbur.

"Thank you, my dear madam; now I have it to a *T*," shouted McBriar, returning to the charge. "*D serves: deserves.* One good turn deserves another. You know on a street-car there is always room for *another*."

"You are in too big a hurry, Doctor Mac," laughed Mrs. Silvers. "Begin at the beginning, if you please. Miss Kate says *she* is not *one*, or *one good*."

"Not won! How sweet the assurance! Then there may be hope for me yet," cried the open-spoken surgeon.

"*None but the brave deserve the fair!*" exclaimed Mr. Hawthorn, who had made no previous guesses, bowing as he spoke to the ladies collectively, and to Miss Comerford in particular.

"There it is again!" said the disgusted doctor. "This is the second time Mr. Hawthorn has presented the flower after I had been at the trouble of removing the thorns."

"I acknowledge my indebtedness, McBriar; your *deserves* gave me the clue."

Mrs. Duval had been every moment expecting the return of her husband, bringing with him some guests from across the river. Whatever could have detained him, it is a well-known fact that taffy, like time, waits for no man, and must be pulled without delay when once it arrives at the right stage.

So the smoking plates were brought in and placed on tables; hands were hurriedly washed, and all went to work with right good will.

Just as they were fully under way—the colonel

pulling until he was red in the face and perspiring freely, Kate and Volney helping each other in the sweet work,—doubtless they would have been singing The Sweet Bye and Bye, had that song been in existence,—Waters, still in part of his Indian toggery, going through a spirited war-dance on account of burnt fingers, the slight and sprightly Rubenstein hopping about the room for the like reason, all laughing, advising, remonstrating—Captain Duval made his appearance, and with him Señor Bolzones and *el Doctor* Moreno, the former a handsome, black-haired, bright-eyed, and fair-skinned Castilian of pure blood, the latter dark as a mulatto, low in stature, with uncouth features,—a common Mexican, in fact.

After presenting his guests, whose low bows were returned with as much dignity as the candy-pullers found consistent with their own sticky condition, Captain Duval apologized for his unavoidable detention in Mexico.

The strangers, who had never before witnessed a candy-pulling, were somewhat astonished. However, the surgeon jumped to the conclusion that this must be an American dance. "What pity so beautiful dance and no music! I will the music make," he cried, seized upon Hawthorn's guitar, and struck up a spirited tune.

All laughed and entered into the spirit of the dance, still pulling away at the taffy until stopped by sheer exhaustion. It was now insisted that the new-comers should be initiated into the mysteries of taffy-pulling.

While engaged in washing their hands on the back porch, Señor Bolzones, who had been contemplating the dirty paws of his countryman with profound disgust as he fingered the guitar, remarked, "I say, Moreno, if I report your proceedings to-morrow to our *comandante*, he will have you arrested for handing over so large a portion of the soil of Mexico to a foreign power without compensation."

"Look to yourself, *capitan*," retorted he of the dingy digits. "Our country can better afford to lose a trifle of her soil than the *hearts* of her soldiers, and I suspect yours has wandered to the wrong side of the river."

In order not to lose sight of Miss Kate, Dr. McBriar had now joined her and Volney on the front porch, under pretext of cooling his candy. Somewhat exhausted with his labors, our good surgeon sat himself down on a bench. He arose again in a hurry, and so likewise did a plate of taffy, which had previous possession of that bench. And, thirdly, there arose a cry of distress from Master Alcibiades Duval, who had there deposited his plate of sweetness to cool off.

"Thunder and lightning! you limb of old Harry!" growled the doctor, tugging away at the plate.

"Limb yourself!" piped Alcy, picking up his plate as it fell. "That isn't fair now; you have carried off half my candy," as the doctor sprang over the banister and struck a bee-line for his own quarters.

"Alcibiades, you are a darling. I had no idea how fond I was of children," said Volney. "Here,

you shall have half of my *dulces:* that is Mexican for sweets."

"But you don't know that Alcy is thinking of shooting you, Mr. Volney, because he wants Cousin Kate for his own sweetheart," said Clay Ashbur. "Now, I wouldn't have a girl who was so ignorant. She don't know nothing. I said I was going to tattoo, and she thought I was going to mark up my face like a savage Injun. And she can't whistle roll-call or nothing. *I* think, being a colonel's daughter, she ought to be sent to a milintery school."

"I am going to a convent school," said the young lady, "where it is to be hoped some of my terrible deficiencies will be repaired. Mrs. Silvers has persuaded my father to send me to the 'Sacred Heart' in St. Louis instead of back to my old school. I have never been inside a convent, and have a great curiosity about the life of the nuns."

"Why does not your father send you to a Church school?" asked Mrs. Ashbur, who had joined them.

"You mean Episcopal; but my father's family are all Presbyterians."

"Oh, then, of the two take the convent by all means," replied Mrs. Ashbur, who was very High Church. "We live like heathen at this post, no chaplain, and no Protestant minister within miles of us. Mrs. Silvers is the only Catholic among us, if we except the major, who is of the same faith, but very lukewarm."

"Mrs. Silvers tells me she always goes over the river to Mass, and has promised to take me with her

next Sunday. She says we cannot wear bonnets, as they would attract too much notice in the church, so I shall have the pleasure of wearing the graceful *rebosa*. My black lace scarf will answer, she says, worn over the head. There are no seats in the church, and we must kneel or stand. I shall feel as if I had stepped back into the Middle Ages."

CHAPTER V.

On the morning after Mrs. Duval's pleasant little party Mrs. Silvers and Mrs. Ashbur climbed the hill to make Miss Kate a visit. That young lady was not visible on the veranda or in the parlor, but the ladies followed in the direction of a great noise, which led them directly to Miss Comerford's own room. The door standing wide open, they entered. Kate was reclining on a rug on the floor, with a tipped-over chair supporting the pillow under her head, and perched on the round of the chair sat the gray parrot, screaming in Spanish at the little Chihuahua dog, who was barking with all his might in his best English from his stand on the chest of his mistress. The quiet armadillo had contented himself with a bed on her muslin skirt with his head pillowed on her feet, making doubtless silent comments on his noisy comrades.

Quite undisturbed by this hubbub of discords lay

blue-eyed Kate reading a novel, "The Count of Monte Christo."

"Here is the happy family," said Mrs. Ashbur; "we are just in time for the matinee. Good-morning, Kate!" trying to give her voice the pitch which should make it audible between the screaming and the barking.

"Oh, do be quiet for a moment, can't you? You are a nuisance! I am just in the thick of the plot," spoke the fair reader, quite oblivious of the addition to her morning party.

"I say, Kate!" screamed Mrs. Silvers, snatching the heavy volume from the hand of her startled hostess and bringing her to a sense of sublunary matters, "we have not climbed this steep hill to be set down as nuisances by our colonel's polite daughter."

Kate sprang to her feet laughing, threw a shawl over the parrot as the most effectual means of silencing him, while with one hand she held fast the mouth of José to stop his barking. The well-behaved armadillo retired of his own accord to a corner, the chair was set right end up, and the ladies made themselves comfortable.

"You might be more profitably engaged of a morning, my dear," said Mrs. Silvers, "than in reading such stuff;" and she threw the book on the bed with a gesture of contempt, at which Dumas would have shrugged his Africo-French shoulders in surprise.

"Why, Mrs. Silvers, that is an unobjectionable book. The count is very noble, and goes about

rewarding the good and punishing the wicked," said Kate.

"Highly moral!" observed Mrs. Ashbur. "It teaches the religion of revenge, to say nothing of the good taste and propriety of a sinful man taking upon himself to play the part of Providence in meting out rewards and punishments to his fellow-mortals. The book is intensely interesting, I must admit."

"I can't bear goody books," said Miss Kate, frowning, "where the heroines are angels minus wings; and as to religious novels, they are the quintessence of dulness. A good old Baptist aunt of mine once insisted on my reading her pet book, feeling assured it would make me a convert to her faith,—'Grace Truman,' I think it is called. I read it from a sense of duty, but its exceeding dulness had the effect of leaving me less of a Baptist than in the beginning."

Mrs. Silvers laughed: "I shall be careful not to let you read several Catholic novels I know of, for fear of like consequences."

"But I have several of Miss Yonge's stories you are welcome to read, Kate," remarked Mrs. Ashbur. "They are as pure as pearls, deeply religious, and yet very interesting. I have actually shed tears over the death of the passionate yet noble 'Guy, Heir of Redclyffe.' Amy, his wife, though, is rather over-goodish for my taste."

"The 'Dove in the Eagle's Nest' is a most lovely mediæval story," rejoined Mrs. Silvers. "An air of peace and purity seems to exhale from all the works

of this writer. I especially remember the scene in which Christina—*the Dove*—in order to save the life of her husband's cousin, Wildschloss, insists upon his taking her twin babies—the young Eaglets—and showing them to his retainers; and this because Wildschloss must pass, on his way down to the castle court, over a certain trap-door above an *oubliette*. The terrible old Kunigunde,—there's a mother-in-law for you!—as Christina knew, had removed the props of this door in order to make an end of Sir Kasimir. Of course Kunigunde dared not sacrifice her grandchildren, and thus Wildschloss is saved."

"The ardent love which exists between those twin brothers, and their loyal devotion to the dove-like mother, is one of the most touching things ever portrayed by a novelist," said Mrs. Silvers.

"I have read it," said Kate, "and I remember the marriage of the wounded Ebbo to little Theckla, and how I laughed when the Emperor Max, bending down to kiss the child-bride, received a rousing box on the ear, and Theckla crying, 'Go away with you. I know I've never married *you!*' And I remember how sorry I felt for the father of the twins, coming home, after his eighteen years of imprisonment and slavery, to find everything so changed. Poor fellow! his fate is more pathetic than even that of Rip Van Winkle. The story does not end according to my fancy, though," Kate continued. "The gaps in the narrative are too long. I should never had made Ebbo and his mother grow old, but should have let the curtain fall with Ebbo and Theckla still young,

surrounded by a group of little *dove-eagles*, and poor old Sir Eberhard in the midst, happy with his beloved Stina and his grandchildren."

"I often think," said Mrs. Ashbur, dreamily, "the manner in which fame is portioned out to writers of fiction is anything but fair. The writer of 'Jane Eyre' —a genius, doubtless—is placed on a pedestal far above Miss Yonge, it seems; but for my part, rank heresy though it may be deemed, I should rather be known as the author of 'The Chaplet of Pearls' or the 'Dove in the Eagle's Nest' than to have wrtten 'Jane Eyre' or 'Shirley.'"

Mrs. Ashbur had many peculiar tastes, and preferred Dante's "Divine Comedy" to "Paradise Lost."

The next day, as Miss Comerford sat with her friend, Mrs. Ashbur, in the house under the hill, in rushed Tom Heron, evidently troubled in mind. "Aunt Aggy," cried he, "do, for goodness' sake, persuade Uncle George to apologize, or he may not be out of arrest in time for the *baile*. You'll see him come tearing in here directly without his sword."

"Has he been arrested?" exclaimed Miss Kate, raising her hands in horror. "Oh, he will not be shot, will he?"

"Oh, no," replied Tom, coolly; "he will only be sentenced to police the garrison—which means, you understand, to take a broom and sweep up—with a large ball chained to his ankle. Aunt Aggy don't seem much to mind it. She takes a philosophical view of the case, and thinks it all one whether he goes to the Ball or the ball is chained to him."

"Seriously, Kate, you are, for an officer's daughter, shamefully ignorant," remonstrated her friend. "Captain Ashbur's offence has been nothing worse than disrespect to a superior officer. He gives up his sword, stalks about with nothing to do and cannot leave the garrison, and his pay is stopped,—that is all."

As Miss Kate is excusing her ignorance on the plea of never having before seen anything of army life, Captain Ashbur stalks in, looking somewhat like a thunder-cloud.

"What have you been doing, George?" asked his wife, with a significant glance toward where his sword *should have hung*.

"Nothing, confound it! Just as drill was over I received an order to go out on a scout to-morrow morning. Now, I had an important engagement in the village for that day, and was a good deal put out. So I remarked, 'What a precious old granny! there are no Indians within fifty miles of Knocktin.' I was only speaking to myself, and how the deuce was I to know that the soldier who brought the order had not taken himself and his long ears off? That little speech came to the colonel's ears."

"I hope you will apologize at once," his wife hastened to interrupt, fearing that the length of the commanding officer's ears might next be commented upon.

"I'll do nothing of the sort," was the curt reply. "It is coming to that pass that a man cannot call his soul his own. Such tyranny is intolerable——"

"Captain Ashbur," cried the colonel's indignant daughter, "how dare you call my father a tyrant, and a—a—that other name? I will never speak to you again." She seized her hat and rushed from the house, her blue eyes dark with anger.

"Stop, stop, Miss Kate, for mercy's sake!" shouted the astounded captain, running after her, his passion quite cooled down by this counter-fire from a quarter so unexpected. "What a brute I have been to speak so before you! I beg ten thousand pardons."

"If *that* is your opinion of my father I would rather know it, and not be mistaking you for a friend," returned Miss Comerford, bursting into tears, but not checking her rapid walk.

"But it is *not* my opinion of your father. Can't you understand? I was in a passion. My epithets were quite impersonal; they were not intended for Colonel Comerford, but for the commanding officer in general. Had that order come from the angel Gabriel, he would have fared no better at my hands. Come, Cousin Kate, let us make friends; I will make every apology to the colonel at once. I hate myself for bringing tears to those pretty blue eyes."

Kate could not resist the penitent pleading of Captain George. They parted good friends. Ample apologies were made and accepted, and the arrest removed in time to give the captain the pleasure of making one at the grand *baile*. The scout only lasted a day and a half; and as her husband came safely home, not meeting with Indians (yet finding traces of the savages which quite vindicated the

colonel's judgment), Mrs. Ashbur was not very sorry that the "important engagement" in town was not kept, for she shrewdly suspected a game at cards, *not* altogether for amusement alone, was the attraction; while Tom Heron blessed his stars that Kate's timely tears had overcome his uncle's obstinate scruples.

CHAPTER VI.

A FEW days previous to the time set for the Mexican *baile* Mrs. Silvers had a long and private conversation with Mrs. Ashbur, to which conference, finally, young Heron was admitted. The trouble was this: While sitting on her porch quite late one evening, Mrs. Silvers had overheard a conversation between Lieutenants Volney and Waters as they sat on their porch, and just as she was about to move away to avoid eavesdropping she fortunately caught the import of their words, which left no scruples about listening with the most rapt attention. Paul Volney and Kate Comerford were actually betrothed, —the young geese!—nor was this the full extent of his madness and her folly. Despairing of gaining her father's consent, and fearing to lose her should she depart free, Volney had at length prevailed on her to agree to a clandestine marriage, the ceremony to be performed while they were all in the Mexican town, on the very evening of the *baile*, but not be acknowledged openly until the bride's educa-

tion should be completed. Then Mr. Volney would address the supposed Miss Comerford in due form, gain her father's consent, and be married in the face of all the world. It seemed that the two stood equally in awe of the colonel, and endeavored to persuade themselves that this first ceremony need never come to his knowledge at all.

Mrs. Ashbur, in her indignation, denounced Mr. Paul Volney (hitherto a decided favorite of hers) as a pitiful villain who richly deserved to be cashiered. How could a man with one spark of honor persuade a girl—almost a child still—to such an act of disobedience and deceit? And how could Kate, certainly old enough to know better, be so lost to all womanly delicacy, so wanting in self-respect, as to consent to a secret marriage?

Mrs. Silvers had been equally shocked; thought both the high contracting parties inexcusable. But still Volney appeared to her more in the light of a thoughtless, hare-brained youth, not at all conscious of the gravity of the sin he was about to commit. In fine, she thought both were to be pitied as well as blamed,—pitied for the ignorance in which, as Protestants, they had been reared in regard to this matter. Had they been taught to regard marriage as a holy sacrament, clandestine marriage as a sin, as the Church teaches, what a safeguard would this have been! Instead, these young people had all their lives heard courtship and marriage treated of in the most frivolous and worldly manner, and had seen, moreover, how easily the tie can be dissolved.

"Too true," assented Mrs. Ashbur; "but do not confound all Protestants. Many hold—I am sure I do—to the true Catholic belief in the sanctity and inviolability of marriage."

Now, nothing could be more simple than by a hint to the colonel as to how matters stood to make an end of the whole affair. Whether the adoption of this straightforward course was declined solely out of consideration for Volney's future, or whether a slight taste of the ladies for intrigue might somewhat have influenced the decision, who shall say? It was most assuredly true that to betray all would be the ruin of Volney,—at least, would make his position in the regiment a very awkward one.

"And I for one protest against having anything to do with *Volney's Ruins;* it is too immoral," declared Heron.

"Be serious, if you can, Tom. This is no laughing matter," remonstrated the elder lady. "We depend entirely on your ingenuity, Tom, to discover all the details of their precious plan, and——"

"I almost have it now," interrupted Tom, waking as from a brown study. "I might personate my cousin. 'Oh, Paul, what would papa say if he knew!'" mimicked Heron so perfectly that his fellow-conspirators lost their gravity.

"However, Kate never says *papa*, which you will remember, Tom," said his aunt, "if you *should* have to assume her character, which of course you will not."

"There is no saying what the exigencies of this

most excruciatingly complicated case may require before we see the end of it," replied Tom, solemnly shaking his wise head.

The two ladies regarded each other in silence, feeling pretty much like a couple of children who were trusting to a monkey for some useful service.

"*Can* we trust your discretion, Tom?" said Mrs. Silvers, in a doubtful tone of voice.

"Ladies, I give you my word as a gentleman, you may safely trust me. I see the folly of these young people as plainly as you do. Volney is not the man to make my cousin happy, and I will,—well, I will take him to the bottom of the Rio Grande and stay there with him until Kate is safe out of Texas but what I shall put a stop to this."

Though the dignity and gravity of the first part of this speech was rather upset by the winding up, it was plain to see that Heron was, for once in his life, in earnest.

"I really think Tom may be fully trusted," said his aunt. "At all events, it is Hobson's choice."

Tom, who was not wanting in wit or common sense when he had an object in view, managed so well that he contrived to be an attentive though secret auditor of the following conversation between Volney and his friend:

Waters. Well, Paul, if you will not be persuaded to give it up, I suppose I must help you; but it goes against my conscience, I do assure you. Now, your notion of getting the *padre* to tie the knot will never answer. For why: as it is impossible to get unmar-

ried when once the Catholic Church pronounces you man and wife, so, likewise, it is not half so easy to get the noose adjusted as it is among us Protestants. The priest will require your certificate of birth, baptism, confirmation, vaccination——

"Damnation!" broke in the impatient Volney.

"No; that much will be taken for granted," said his friend, dryly.

Volney. What the deuce do they want with my certificate of birth? At my present age I should think *that* might be taken for granted.

Waters. Unless you are supposed to be a *self-made* man. But to be serious—and, Paul, however *you* may take it, *I* feel this to be a confoundedly serious undertaking. I would not stand in your shoes for, no, not for the rank of a major, when the time comes to make this stolen march known to the colonel.

Volney. There will be no need of his ever having a suspicion of this little preliminary ceremony; we regard it as only a species of betrothal. I will not run the chance of losing my darling forever by letting her go free. There is nothing like taking time by the forelock.

Waters (*with a profound sigh*). A wilful man must have his way; but if the colonel was within ear-shot, you would think you had taken a mule by the fetlock. The priest being out of the question, I have been making inquiries, and find there is a Protestant minister, an American, residing in the town; he has, of course, given up preaching and gone into business, but he will answer our purpose. Fortunately, he

lives only a block or two from the house in which the ball is given. I'll arrange it all with the parson beforehand. We can step over from the ball-room, have you put into double harness, and be back again among the dancers before we are missed.

Volney. We must throw cloaks over our uniforms and pass ourselves on the parson for Mexicans, to make assurance doubly sure and prevent an inkling of the affair reaching the old gentleman. It will be easy enough to pick up enough Spanish to enable us to make our responses. Wouldn't Rubenstein give his eyes, or his moustache, to know what we are about?

"And what would you give, I wonder," said Tom to himself, "to know that I am about to put a spoke in your wheel, a spider in your dumpling,—in fine, to throw a wet blanket on your hopes and cruelly extinguish Hymen's torch? A pretty wedding this for a daughter of the house of Comerford!—no cake, no cards! Well, gentlemen, you will find you have played your cards so badly that I shall take the odd trick and win the game as sure as my name is Tom Heron."

CHAPTER VII.

RUBENSTEIN, as officer of the day, had to forego the pleasure of the trip to the Mexican post to attend the grand ball. Almost every one else, even Mrs. Francisco, went over, Mrs. Ashbur and Mrs. Duval taking their babies and nurses along, as the party from Knocktin Barracks was to remain all night on the Mexican side.

Crossing the river in the ferry-boats, the Americans were met at the landing by a number of carriages and an escort of soldiers, sent by their courteous hosts to convey them to the town, some four miles distant from the Rio Grande.

"That is a picturesque dress and a pretty brown face," remarked Mrs. Francisco as they passed a peasant-girl by the road-side. Her costume consisted of a bright woollen *falda*, or skirt, in white figures, the upper part of the skirt being plain blue. No spencer was visible; the chemise was handsomely wrought, while the gray thread *rebosa*, passing over the head and across the breast, with one end thrown over the left shoulder, served to drape the bare neck and arms.

"I particularly admire the courtesy of manner so universal among the people here," said Mrs. Ashbur. "When we pass a Mexican on the road he never fails to touch his hat and wish us *buenos dias*, or *buenas*

tardes; while Americans—or shall I say *United Staters?* it seems rather presumptuous to claim exclusively the first title among a people who have an equal right to be called Americans—pass each other as if they were not inhabitants of the same planet."

"We Americans of the North might well take a lesson in politeness," said Mr. Hawthorn. "And do you observe, Mrs. Ashbur, how much more comprehensive than ours is the Spanish salutation? They wish us not simply good-day, but good-days,—that is, many of them."

On arriving in the small village, which was also a military post, the ladies found that they had rooms in the same house in which the ball was to be held. This arrangement was very convenient, especially for Mrs. Duval and Mrs. Ashbur, on account of the babies.

About twilight Tom Heron was strolling leisurely along the suburbs of the town by the side of the *madre azacaya* (that is, the big ditch which supplies the smaller ditches for the purpose of irrigation), pondering on his plans for saving his silly cousin and routing Hymen, when, observing a boy wading about with his trousers rolled above his knees, he hailed the lad, mostly for the purpose of airing his stock of Spanish: "*Ven aca, mi buen muchachito!*"

"Vinegar yourself, Mr. Tom! Why can't you talk English?" replied the supposed Mexican.

"Alcy Duval!" cried Heron. "What the dickens are you doing on the wrong side of the Rio?"

"Oh, wanted to see foreign countries, and mother said I should not come with the rest of you; so I

just smuggled myself over in advance. Have some? They are first-rate," shaking himself as he came out of his foot-bath and proffering a handful of *peñones* (pine-nuts, which look like large brown beans).

"*Muy bueno*," said Tom, as he tasted one. "I'll wager you will find out everything that is good to eat during your sojourn in a foreign land."

"You bet!" said Alcibiades, winking with his left eye. "Hush! here comes your Cindy and our Bridget, giving the babies an airing. I am going to 'sprise them and have some fun with Cindy." This was Mrs. Ashbur's colored nurse.

"I say, Mr. Tom," as the nurses and babies came near, "did you ever before see a Mexican girl as dark in complexion as that one? I think she can't be of the pure *Castile-soapian* blood. I'll ask her name, and if that white baby is hers."

"Señora, *como sammer stay?*" (his way of pronouncing *Como se llama V.*). "And is that *muy blanco niño* your own?"

Bridget gave a start and nearly dropped her baby, while Cindy tossed her turbaned head in disdain.

"You here!" said the former; "faith, I belave it's a fairy changeling you are, for no mortal child was ever so full of the mischief."

"But won't his father make him laugh on t'other side of his mouf, *poco tiempo, quien sabe?*" said Cinda, getting in her word of Spanish, of which she had picked up more than either Heron or Alcy.

"Hear! hear! they can speak broken English," cried Alcy, feigning unbounded surprise.

"Anyhow, Cinda, seeing it is you," said Heron, "are you aware that you were free from the moment your foot touched Mexican soil? A pretty sizable foot for a Cinderella. Perhaps you will claim your freedom and elect to stay on this side. Hey?"

"Don't s'pose, do you, I'd leave Miss Agnes to live 'mong these *Greasers!* They are so ignorant they can't understand you when you talk to 'em in American, and do nothing but jabber. Besides, I thank my stars I ain't no Romisher, bowing down to idols and popes. I don't want to be caught up and hid away in a convent and made a monk of."

When the mother of Alcibiades found that her eldest son had embraced this opportunity of beginning his foreign travels, she only smiled calmly and remarked that "boys will be boys." Tom Heron said this was the first time the lady was ever known to condescend to use four short words in succession.

The walls of the *sala grande* on the night of the ball were handsomely decorated with swords and bayonets arranged in fanciful figures, and with the Stars and Stripes and the Mexican flags hanging in amicable festoons. The dances consisted of quadrilles, waltzes, polkas, schottisches: every Mexican, old or young, high or low, dances. The military band discoursed inspiriting music, and Mrs. Duval was especially struck by the plaintive national air of the *Ponchada*, played between the dances. Of course the courteous managers failed not to introduce that grand old tune, *The Star-Spangled Banner*, which sounded doubly sweet when heard on foreign soil.

Every one enjoyed the evening thoroughly; the gay dresses of the ladies, the bright uniforms of the Mexican officers, and the less showy yet very tasteful ones of the United States infantry and artillery, with the background of flags and swords, presented altogether a brilliant combination.

The Mexican *comandante* shone resplendent in gold embroidery, even the stripes down the sides of his pantaloons being embroidered in gold thread.

Young Heron hoped that by the time he gained *his* commission this improvement would be introduced in the uniform of the infantry in place of the plain stripe of white cloth.

The hat of the *comandante* resembled the old Revolutionary cocked hat, and across the crown was arranged a row of short ostrich-plumes.

Miss Comerford, who was to leave Texas on the next day with her father, found this, her first ball, always an event in the life of a young girl, simply enchanting.

"*Beso las manos de V.,* señora*" [I kiss your hands], said a Mexican officer to Miss Comerford, making a low and stately bow as he passed on.

"What did that gentleman say when I promised him my hand for the next dance?" inquired Miss Kate.

"He says it is *base and low manners to stay* hanging round a lady who is dancing with another gentleman," replied saucy Tom.

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* NOTE.—*V.* for *usted;* pronounced *oo-stay.*

Volney could not help laughing, for this exactly described his own position, as Kate was dancing with her cousin; but he refused to take the broad hint, and stood his ground, getting in a word or two in the pauses of the dance.

"This room is tastefully ornamented," innocently remarked Volney, for Tom's benefit, then added, in a low tone of voice, "*In the confusion after supper*—(aloud) I am glad to see these flags hanging peacefully side by side—(in undertone)—*meet me at the south door.*"

"I shall if I am spared!" was the inward resolve of Master Tom, whose sharp ears had not failed to catch the last words.

No one but Mrs. Silvers noticed that very soon after this Mrs. Ashbur and young Heron disappeared simultaneously from the ball-room. Now, some fifteen or twenty minutes later, Captain Ashbur, on going to their room in search of his wife, found her in close conversation with a lady in blue, whose head and face were almost hidden by her *rebosa.*

"Agnes, Hawthorn says you promised this set to him. Hillo, Kate! I thought I left you on the floor. And so you have adopted the graceful *rebosa?*"

"Mrs. Ashbur," lisped the lady in blue, "the captain will bear watching; Tom says he is sweet on the *señoritas;*" and she glided out of the room.

"Heavens, how like!" exclaimed the captain's wife, taken off her guard.

"Like what? If you mean like my old self before we were married, to flirt, I assure you, my dear,

you are mistaken. I am too swarthy myself to fancy brunettes."

"Nonsense, George!" laughed his wife. "Let us return to the Terpsichorean hall, as Mrs. Duval might say. I can't stay here listening to your excuses while my partner is waiting. Remember, you are to dance the last set with me; if it is not exactly according to etiquette to dance with one's husband, our friends here will perhaps take it as one of our North American fashions, and a very pretty custom it is, I think."

Supper was no sooner over than Mrs. Ashbur found herself taken suddenly ill, and, seizing Miss Comerford by the arm, begged she would have the kindness to go with her to her room. That young lady, who was just then bent on going in another direction, looked wildly around, hoping to find a substitute, but all in vain. And, to add to her chagrin and perplexity, no sooner had they reached her apartment than Mrs. Ashbur fainted quite away.

Mrs. Silvers, who now entered the room, pooh-poohed the idea of Kate's running for the doctor or for Captain Ashbur. What was the use of making a disturbance? She would undertake to bring any one out of a simple fainting-fit. And, after some energetic measures on her part, her efforts were duly rewarded. Mrs. Ashbur began to show slight symptoms of revival.

Here at last was Kate's chance; so that young lady begged to be excused for a moment, she would soon return.

"My dear," said Mrs. Silvers, as she coolly locked the door, keeping the key in her hand, "how can you be so very unfeeling? I shall not leave our poor friend, nor must you. Indeed, how could you, unless you choose to leave half your dress behind you? See how convulsively she grasps your skirt."

"This is intolerable!" exclaimed their victim, stamping her foot. "What shall I do?"

"Kate," spoke Mrs. Ashbur, suddenly coming into full possession of all of her lately-suspended faculties, "do you not think some three years hence, and in your father's house, will be the best time and place for this little drama, in which you were about to act the part of Juliet?"

The startled and blushing maiden clasped her hands over her eyes in a passion of tears, in which anger had more share than grief.

"Does my father know—— Have you told my father?" she demanded.

On being solemnly assured he was in blissful ignorance of the whole affair, "If you will promise *never* to tell him I'll—forgive you," sobbed the magnanimous maiden.

"Indeed you will, and thank us too before many months have gone by," replied Mrs. Silvers. "Can you not see that any man capable of leading you into such a hare-brained escapade would prove no suitable protector!"

"Think of the ingratitude, the deceit, toward your kind father. Moreover, what does a child like you know of her own mind? A few years hence and

Paul Volney will not suit your ideas of a husband at all," added Mrs. Ashbur; thus, after the manner of successful people, pushing her advantage a step too far.

"I did not think of it in that light. I never thought of my father's feelings," said Kate, sadly, answering the first clause of the speech. Then to the second she responded, impatiently, "I never want to hear a word on this subject again. I am sick of it. I hate advice. Indeed, just now I believe I hate everything and everybody."

"I trust Monsieur Paul comes in for a full share of that disgust, as the prime cause of all this vexation," whispered Mrs. Silvers to her co-conspirator. "Let us wash our faces, shake out our ruffled plumage, return to the ball-room, and have one more dance before we retire," she continued aloud, adjusting her gauze turban and passing the towel dripping with bay-rum to Miss Comerford.

The young bride that was to have been bathed her flushed face, heaved a long sigh,—of relief it sounded,—and was soon laughing and dancing, so evidently heart-free as to prove what a child she really was.

"Where is Aunt Agnes?" young Heron was heard inquiring on the following morning soon after breakfast. "She promised to take a stroll with me this morning to see the old church. Oh, Mrs. Silvers, you will do just as well. Come!" unceremoniously tucking that little woman's hand under his arm and hurrying her away. No sooner were they out of hearing than he began:

"I shall explode if I don't confide in some one. The day of my destiny's over! Oh, thou hast been the cause of this anguish, my—cousin! I was o'er young to marry yet, but Fate would have it so, and the matrimonial *lasso* has fallen and I am throttled!" placing his hands on his throat.

"Tom Heron, if you don't put a stop to this nonsense and tell me a straight story, I'll leave you." And Mrs. Silvers stood still in the path, looking as if she would like much to push her teasing companion over into the cool waters of the *azacaya*.

"Well, thus it was; we met ('twas *not* in a crowd, and I knew he would *not* shun me,—bad luck to him!—but at the south door). Now, my honest intention was to excuse myself from keeping my—I mean Kate's; well, it is all one—promise, and then to get away as fast as possible. But Fate, or Cupid, held other views in the matter, and carried them out. For once the course of true love ran with alarming smoothness. I was hurried along between Volney and Waters—against my will."

"Tom Heron, you *never* mean to say that you went to the length of—— We ought to have known better than to trust such a mad-cap;" and Mrs. Silvers gave a troubled groan.

"Ingratitude, thy name is woman; this is the thanks I get for departing from the dignity of my sex, and getting myself into a predicament from which it will require all my wit and ingenuity to escape. But, my dear lady, please don't interrupt again. I begin to feel symptoms of collapse, or something, after all I

have gone through with, and I wish to unburden my conscience before I faint away.

"I was hurried on against my will, as I was telling you. Now, fortunately, some presentiment of what was coming must have crossed my mind, for, before leaving the ball-room, in passing McBriar, I asked him: 'What is *I do* in Spanish?' '*Como esta V.*,' said he. So as we three went along (looking like three black dominos, wrapped in our cloaks) I kept repeating, under my breath, '*como 'star stay, como 'sta stay*,' until, having my attention distracted by one of Volney's confounded love-speeches, I lost the first part. And, if you will please to believe me, I tried every lake on the globe before I got back to the right one. It was *Superior 'star stay, Erie 'star stay, Geneva 'star stay*, before I got back to *Como.*

"When the parson looked at me and asked in Spanish if I would have that woman—man I mean—to be my wedded wife—husband, I would say—I lisped and simpered, '*Como 'star stay.*'

"Here Jack Waters, who was bridesmaid, behaved shamefully; he giggled, and nearly swallowed his handkerchief; then he whispered to me, '*Si.*' But all I wanted to see was my way out of that mess. The ring did very well for my little finger, and Paul was too far gone to notice the difference of third or fourth finger."

"No wonder Mr. Waters laughed, when you said '*How do you do?*' instead of '*I do*,'" said Mrs. Silvers, laughing in spite of herself, "though it should have been, '*I will.*'"

"Ah!" said Heron, drawing a long breath, "that is the first ray of comfort I have had yet. I am not nearly so much married as I thought. Those lines of Scott have been all night sounding a mournful dirge through my poor brain:

> "'Widowed wife and wedded maid;
> Betrothed, betrayer, and betrayed.'"

"Mrs. Silvers, you and my aunt must keep counsel, for Volney will call me out if ever he hears of this trick."

"Not a soul shall know a word from us. And perhaps it will sober Paul Volney down a little to be allowed to believe, for a while, he is really married. We shall take care, for your sake, that no opportunity occurs for explanation. Colonel Comerford and Kate leave this very afternoon for New Orleans."

On their way home Miss Kate was very quiet, and not a little astonished to observe Mr. Volney's high spirits. Some one remarked, as the ferry-boats were taking them slowly over the Rio Grande, that Heron was not himself, so rapt in contemplation he seemed.

"Nor am I myself," said that young man. "Is my name still Heron?" addressing the clouds as he gazed heavenward.

"Tom is so immersed in Spanish that he supposes his very name translated," hurriedly observed his aunt, feeling uneasy as to what might come next.

"Yes, that is it," rejoined Tom. "What is the Mexican for Heron, I wonder?"

"*Gaza*," said Mr. Hawthorn. "And Jack's here," touching Waters's shoulder, "would be *Juan Aguas*."

"What would mine be?" said Kate.

"*Catalina* for Catharine; I do not know how to change the Comerford," said Hawthorn.

"Perhaps Paul does," remarked Waters, innocently, expecting, of course, to see the young lady blush.

"*Mil gracias*, I prefer mine as it is," said the unabashed Kate, actually laughing.

"And quite right, for some years to come, Miss Kate," said Dr. McBriar, "and then you shall have the refusal of mine. Pray, what are you laughing at, young men? A very good old name it is."

"She takes the situation coolly," whispered Waters to his friend.

In a few hours after reaching home, Colonel Comerford and his flaxen-haired, blue-eyed daughter stepped on the deck of the small steamboat which was to take them as far as the Gulf on their way to New Orleans, and from thence they would go on to St. Louis, leaving Major Silvers in command at Knocktin Barracks.

"Do not forget our trip into Mexico," said Volney, impressively, as he clasped Miss Comerford's hand in a last adieu.

"I shall always be thankful that—that—all ended as it did," stammered the lady, blushing.

As the boat moved off Lieutenant Waters remarked to his sorrowing friend, "I know not which most to admire, Mrs. Volney's candor or her composure."

PART SECOND.

LIFE IN TENTS.

CHAPTER I.

If the climate of Italy is really more delightful than that of Texas in the region of San Antonio de Bexar,—if its skies are bluer, its sunsets more radiantly beautiful, its flowers brighter,—then must Italy fall little short of Paradise.

In the early autumn of 185–, more than two years subsequent to the parting of Paul Volney with the young girl he believed to be his bride, the birds flying under the deep-blue sky and over the bright flowers of the rolling prairie, some fifty miles north of San Antonio, looked down upon a long train of white-covered wagons, preceded by six companies of infantry trudging wearily along, with their bayonets and tin canteens gleaming in the rays of the descending sun, the monotony in hue of their light-blue uniform, broken here and there by the dark-blue of that of the officers. Some of the officers marched on foot with their men, while others, who could afford to keep a horse, made his feet serve instead of their own.

The field-officers, Colonel Comerford and Major Silvers, accompanied by Dr. McBriar, the surgeon, rode side by side in the van of the procession, consulting over the most suitable spot for camping. Colonel Comerford's good steed, like John Gilpin's, carried weight, that officer having grown no thinner since we saw him last at Knocktin Barracks.

In the rear of the few wagons which now pushed forward in advance of the train to the camping-ground, because they were loaded with the tents and camping equipments of the officers, came the ambulances of those who had their families with them.

The stopping-place is reached; the wagons are drawn up on a hill-side in a grove of live-oaks. The men swarm about like ants; stakes are driven, mules and horses watered and picketed, tents pitched, and in less than an hour the whilom lonely landscape is made cheerful by a village of white tents. Perhaps the birds, sailing far overhead, fancy the large tents of the officers and the smaller ones of the soldiers to be some strange species of mammoth bird with its young.

The children, tired of so much riding, scamper hither and thither, delighted to stretch their little legs and to gather the wild-flowers. The ladies rest quietly in their tents for an hour or so, then take a bath, make their simple toilets, and are ready for the late dinner,—or, as the children call it, dinner-supper,—taken, if weather permits, in front of the tent, the sun being now almost down. After this the ladies walk abroad, visit each other, or stroll down to

the other end of the camp to see the soldiers answer to roll-call and to listen to the cheery music of the fife and drum.

This detachment of troops consists of six companies of the—let us say Twelfth Regiment of Infantry (this is not the correct number, for at that time, 185–, there were not so many infantry regiments in the service, but we never like to read of the *Blankth* Regiment), on their way to establish a post in the wilderness, some two hundred miles north of San Antonio. Toward evening four ladies and a dozen or two officers had assembled in front of Mrs. Silvers's tent.

"And so you are sorry to leave San Antonio, Mrs. Ashbur?" said Mrs. Silvers. "On the contrary, we were willing enough to desert Fort Davis, although my husband was in command there, and will not be at our new post. We were so completely out of the world at that retired spot; besides, I never could rid myself of the impression that Indians were perched upon the rocks above that narrow *cañon*, ready to hurl the loose stones down on our devoted heads."

"Dear, delightful, picturesque San Antonio, with its odd mixture of old Mexican and new American buildings; its quaint old church, historical *Alamo*, narrow streets; its suburbs of huts minus floors or chimneys; its clear, shallow river winding through the town, lovely flowers, gnarled old fig-trees and gorgeous pomegranates! It breaks my heart to leave thee, and to think it may be years before I see thee again! And we have been compelled to leave half of

our furniture behind for want of transportation," added Mrs. Ashbur, with a sudden descent from sentiment to commonplace.

"There's not in this wide world a valley so sweet," sang Mrs. Duval.

"Do you know, Kate, there is actually a *Vale of Avoca* in the neighborhood of San Antonio?" said Mrs. Ashbur, turning to the young lady who sat by her side. For, her years of school-life over, Miss Comerford had returned to Texas to preside over the household of her father. To compare her in beauty to her former self, as the open rose to the bud, will not suffice, for the bud is by many preferred to the rose. So we shall say she was now as much more lovely as the full-fledged bird is than the nestling. Character, soul, intellect, which were but faintly outlined in the young maiden, now found full expression in the deep-blue eyes and singularly handsome mouth.

Lieutenant Hawthorn, who had found the colonel's daughter charming in the olden time, now felt her to be simply irresistible.

"And have you no regrets at leaving El Paso, Mrs. Duval?" asked Captain Ashbur. "Waters has been tantalizing us on the weary march to-day by his vivid description of the luscious fruits of that Blissful spot."

"Fort Bliss is assuredly highly favored in that respect. I am passionately fond of fruit, and I shall long cherish the remembrance of its golden quinces, its clusters of transparent purple and white grapes,—which might be compared to pearls and amethysts,—

from which flowed delicious nectar, and its saccharine figs, sweeter than ambrosia. Still, there were shadows on the sunny picture, and I am glad to have been withdrawn from the scene before my darling infants had all the sense beaten out of their little craniums, or their tender limbs dislocated, or ere I had sprained my ankles walking over the ill-constructed pavements," was Mrs. Duval's short and simple answer.

"Timber is so scarce up there," explained Captain Duval, "that our floors were of brick, and, although they were softened by a layer of straw and two carpets, one over the other, still our children got some terrible bumps from falls. And after Antonio had tumbled out of bed and raised some bumps not set down in phrenology, my wife insisted on dispensing with a bedstead. But I can't say I fancied sleeping on the floor, for the spiders and granddaddy-long-legs to make a promenade of my countenance. The pavements in front of our doors had been laid with cobble-stones by some good Catholic with a view to penance. But I was well enough contented there, for, though the region about us was a desert, the post itself was a jolly place."

"Entirely too much so for married men," rejoined his wife, "for, what with dances, bull-fights, cock-fights, and other delectable and refined amusements, our officers spent quite too much of their time across the river in the old town of El Paso. And the fine sand of Fort Bliss was another nuisance, penetrating, as it did, through crevices and keyholes, until often

the figures on the carpets were quite obliterated. To be sure, the green plot of Mexican clover in the centre of the garrison seemed all the more lovely by contrast with the surroundings,—an oasis in the desert."

"Well, I don't know how we shall manage to exist without the fruit," remarked Lieutenant Heron, who had at last received his commission. "From May, when the apricots ripened, all along until winter, we almost lived on fruit,—figs, grapes, peaches, pears, apples, quinces. Such quinces as grow nowhere else on this continent. I kept a pile of them in one corner of my room that I might enjoy their fragrance. The orchards and vineyards are all irrigated; consequently the fruit-crop never is known to fail."

"The El Paso onion is a monstrous fine fruit too," exclaimed Dr. McBriar, rubbing his hands, as over some pleasant recollection.

"Yes; the doctor kept a pile of them in his room that he might enjoy *their* delicate bouquet," said Mr. Waters, with one of his good-natured smiles.

"Everything goes by contraries at El Paso, Miss Kate," observed Captain Francisco (captain by brevet): "the trees grow mostly under ground, so when fire-wood is needed it must be dug for, and it is astonishing what a quantity of large roots are found belonging to each small bush. They must be the roots of large trees which have been burned down, and are now sprouting up once more. Of course there are some large trees near the river, but these

(principally cotton-wood) are too precious to be cut down. The Mexicans economize by climbing a tree and cutting off a limb or two as needed; these, like the amputated legs of a lobster, are soon duplicated. The whole face of the earth is cut up and subdivided by the numerous *azacayas*, so that the garden-walks are ridges, the beds being the depressed portions."

"The vineyards must be very beautiful," said Mrs. Ashbur.

"Very different from your idea of a vineyard, I dare say," said Dr. McBriar. "You are thinking of vines running over trellises, under which you can walk and gather the hanging grapes, whereas the El Paso vineyard is only a field covered with big stumps, from which the short vines spring up. But 'pretty is as pretty does,' and these stumps give you bushels of grapes."

"Did you ever witness a bull-fight, Mrs. Duval?" said Miss Comerford. "Do tell us about them." Kate's roguish dimples showed she was anticipating fun from Mrs. Duval's characteristic mode of description.

"They are rather tame affairs at El Paso, Miss Kate," said Captain Duval; "the animals are lean, spiritless creatures, which require a deal of provocation to induce them to show fight, though now and then they grow savage and turn on their tormentors, and wound a man or kill a horse. My wife refused to be present at this popular amusement; but our boys can tell you all about it, as well as act the

matador, *pecador*, and the bull. One amusing scene we often witnessed,—when the men came into the ring on horseback and competed in the task of overthrowing taurus by means of twisting his tail, which they seize in passing on the gallop."

"I suppose you became proficients in the language?" remarked Mrs. Ashbur. "Had we remained on the Rio Grande a year longer, I am sure I should have spoken Spanish as easily as my mother-tongue."

"Not exactly proficients, but by dint of practice and many blunders we made some progress. For instance, I never afterward forgot the difference between *higo* and *hijo* after witnessing the horror of the man of whom I asked if he had any *hijos* (sons) for sale, when I only wished to purchase some figs, *higos*. Waters, wishing to acquaint a *señorita* with the interesting fact that he was *no casado* (not married), told her instead he was no *cansado*, which means not *tiresome*,—a statement she was, of course, too polite to dispute. The two verbs *soy* and *estar*, each signifying *to be*, gave us no end of trouble. It was rather awkward to find you had been speaking of some one as *bad* when you should have said *sick: es malo* means 'is bad;' *esta malo*, 'is sick.'"

"There is one verb, however," remarked Tom Heron with a mischievous, one-sided smile, "which Jack Waters learned to perfection: the verb *to wade*,—the Rio Grande understood. A transitive verb, was it not, Waters?"

"Now, Tom, will *anything* induce you to hold your tongue?" exclaimed Mr. Waters, looking uncomfortably red in the face.

"Nothing. But I will only tell half; that is, if you have no objection to being left in the middle of the river."

Of course the curiosity of the company was excited, and the story followed.

"You must know," began Heron, "that one of the gallant customs of the *greasers* is this: when the river is to be forded they take their wives, or sweethearts, on their shoulders, and tote them across. Now it so happened that I was too late for the ferry-boat one evening, and being determined not to miss the *baile*, I set my wits to work to devise a passage. I knew that Waters was also behind time, so I stepped into a cabin hard by, borrowed a skirt and a *rebosa*, and presto! became a *señorita*. I waited patiently at the fording-place, where Waters found me, about dusk, like Scott's water nymph, wringing my hands, and bemoaning my fate in choice Spanish: '*Mi marido*, who was to have taken me over, had been called off, and I should lose the *baile*.' Jack can stand anything but a woman's tears, so off came his boots, and he gallantly offered me a seat on his stalwart shoulders, apologizing for the want of a saddle."

"Come, Tom, there is no use in making me out a bigger donkey than I was," said the big Kentuckian, with a patient sigh.

"The only ferriage he charged was a kiss. I was

awfully afraid I should laugh and betray myself before we got over. I bade my native land a last adieu. Jack struck up '*Jordan is a hard road to travel*,' and ambled on through the muddy water, while I choked myself to keep from singing, 'A life on the ocean wave.' The hearty hug and kiss I left him as passage-money, when we got over, fully repaid the old fellow."

As the laugh subsided his cousin said, "Tom Heron, you deserve to be court-martialed. If that was not 'conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman,' what is?"

"If I had only found out before we landed, such a ducking as that heavy *señorita* would have caught! Never mind, my turn will come yet."

"It is time," said Tom, "for I have twice had mine. He knows nothing of the first yet," he added, in a whisper to his aunt.

"You don't mean to say you have all this time kept that secret!" she rejoined, in an undertone. "And Volney, is he still under the old impression?"

"I do: he is," said Tom, laconically. "And so must remain; for the complications arising therefrom when Volney shall join us will be something worth witnessing."

"See to it, Tom, that you don't mix your cousin up in any of your complications. But I am sure things never really went so far as you led Mrs. Silvers and myself to believe. I know better than to receive all your stories for gospel."

Tom rolled up his eyes, and said aloud, "Time will show."

"Waters," said Dr. McBriar, "you are about the only man who would not have denied that yarn of Heron's; it is a pretty tough one, and we should have taken your word as soon as his."

"I never could see the good of lying to get yourself out of a scrape," replied the phlegmatic Waters. "Our amusements are limited, so I ought not to begrudge you all a laugh at my expense."

"Let me ride behind you, and take Winny in your lap, Cousin Tom," demanded Master Clay Ashbur, at the hour of starting next morning.

"No, Cay; I shall ride with my own papa," said Winny. And as the will of his little daughter was law with her father, so it was arranged.

Mrs. Francisco had died almost a year previous, and Mrs. Ashbur, who had three boys and no girls, was very glad to keep the little motherless child with her, so that her father might still have her near him.

On the march this day, the new post they were about to establish and its proximity to the Indians were under discussion. Miss Comerford, whose ideas of Indians were chiefly drawn from Cooper's novels and like sources, was rather pleased with the prospect of a nearer view of the noble red men, the unsophisticated children of nature.

"I have always thought," said Kate, "if I should be taken captive by the Indians——"

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated McBriar, fervently.

"I would feign insanity," she continued, "for I have read they never injure one so afflicted, believing them the special favorites of the Great Spirit."

"Do not trust to that, Miss Comerford," said Lieutenant Hawthorn. "The Comanches, at least, are not sufficiently educated to be aware that this *is* one of their characteristics. You have probably heard of the man who found the lion so shamefully ignorant of natural history that he refused to be subdued by the steadfast gaze of the human eye, and was so unscientific as to devour his would-be mesmerizer."

"Then what course should I pursue?" asked Miss Kate, quite seriously.

"Wear a wig or false *chignon* by all means," laughed Captain Ashbur; "and then, Miss Kate, you may be scalped without feeling it."

"I have in my trunk some bright beads and little looking-glasses for presents, to gain the good-will of the squaws, if they visit our camp in amity."

"Let me suggest a few boxes of tobacco as a peace-offering," said Dr. McBriar. "And a lot of fine-tooth combs might not come amiss; that article has been termed the national instrument of warfare among the Mexicans."

"Your beads and mirrors must be given to the braves, not to the squaws," observed Major Silvers; "all trinkets, earrings, etc., are worn by the men."

"And in this I maintain they only copy after

mother Nature. The male birds are the ones adorned with the brilliant plumage, while the females are modestly arrayed in brown or gray. It is only the male woodpecker which sports the cardinal cap," declared Dr. McBriar.

The march from San Antonio occupied a week, and was greatly enjoyed by the ladies. Finding one's self at home every night, with one's own comfortable bed and table, is a vast improvement on the usual routine of travel in the new countries of the West.

Mrs. Duval and Mrs. Ashbur had brought their pet goats along in one of the wagons, for the convenience of the babies, and these miniature cows furnished milk enough for the coffee and tea of all the families.

When the water was muddy a slice or two of the prickly pear served to settle it. And by covering the tin canteens with flannel, and suspending them from the sides of the ambulances, and keeping the covers saturated during the march, the water was made cool and palatable.

Sometimes the Indian guide, or some of the officers, were so fortunate as to kill a deer, which was welcomed as a pleasant change from the salt pork diet. Texas blackbirds, too, were found to be eatable, and 'four-and-twenty blackbirds baked into a pie' occasionally appeared on the table.

One night, Mrs. Ashbur, waking suddenly, was frightened to find her husband missing, and to hear

a whispering outside the tent; then followed several reports of a gun.

"Indians! murder! fire!" she cried. "One, two, three, four,—here are all the children!" And just as she was rushing out in search of her husband, that gentleman appeared at the tent door holding up two large wild turkeys in triumph. The poor birds had ventured to come down to roost on the convenient tents, and this had been their inhospitable reception.

They had their revenge, however, the dish not proving much of a delicacy, for the meat was dry and tough, not at all like the wild turkey of Illinois and Missouri.

CHAPTER II.

THE train had at length reached the point designed as the site of the new post. The officers' tents were pitched on the northern side of a gently sloping ridge looking down over a wide-spreading green valley, and across the winding brook, with its fringe of trees, to the hills beyond.

In the far distance a glimpse of gray mountains gave the needed touch of sublimity to the tranquil landscape.

The prairie all around was diversified and relieved by small groves of live-oak and musquite trees, so exactly resembling apple and peach orchards as to awaken tantalizing memories in this country so de-

void of fruit,—if we except the wild grapes and plums.

These frequent groves in the Texas prairies prove a grateful relief to the eye, and save one from that *at sea* feeling experienced in passing over the limitless prairies of the West.

As the tents are now to serve as houses until quarters can be erected, the ladies look forward to a long sojourn in their Arab dwellings. For stone must be quarried, the scrubby timber prepared for rafters, etc., flooring, sash, and glass hauled from San Antonio, before the canvas roofs are replaced by more substantial material.

So the officers exert their ingenuity in making the tents as comfortable as possible for their families. And only those who have seen this problem worked out can imagine how very comfortable a house with canvas walls may be made.

While on the march a strip of matting or a buffalo robe answers for both floor and carpet. The camp bedstead is quickly set up; a keg serves as candle-stand; cases for combs, brushes, shoes, etc., are buttoned to the canvas walls; a rope stretching from pole to pole does duty as wardrobe; and, in case of a *norther*, an oven of live coals furnishes the requisite warmth.

But now things are to be done on a more elaborate and permanent scale. Fortunately there was a sufficient number of *hospital* tents for the families, who had been content with *wall* tents while on the road.

No longer depending alone on the tent-poles and

pins, frames are now put up over which the canvas is stretched; this holds all taut, and prevents the billowy motion incident to the tent proper. Then,—climax of luxuries!—a genuine chimney is built; so there is now a hearth to the home, surmounted, too, by a small unpainted pine mantel-shelf. Canvas stretched over a frame of pine, having four small panes of glass inserted in the top, is the civilized style of door now indulged in, in lieu of the slit in the tent side with no fastening except stout strings. As a subdued light also finds its way through the walls, no other windows are needed.

Now for the fitting up of the interior. Those officers who had purchased for themselves in San Antonio plank for flooring put it down, while others, less provident, were obliged to content themselves with floors of cement. Over these dried moss was first laid, and then matting or carpet, for Uncle Sam had not seen proper to furnish his "boys in blue" with the luxury of flooring.

Dr. McBriar was heard grumbling over the stinginess of a government which could not even furnish lumber to make coffins for its defenders.

"Any man," said he, "who allows himself the pleasure of dying at this post must make up his mind to being buried in a couple of pork-barrels."

"Nonsense, doctor," said Major Silvers; "our chief at Washington knows what surgeon has charge here, and is confident that where McBriar reigns cemeteries will become obsolete."

"This shall be Heron's epitaph," exclaimed Cap-

tain Ashbur, who had tried in vain to check his nephew in his intemperate indulgence in smoking:

"Here lies the boy so fond of joking:
Death took him off to stop his smoking.
His jokes lack salt,—in point were erring;
And so we salt him down as *Herring*."

Tom, after a little cogitation, returned his uncle's compliment in this wise:

"In this whiskey-barrel lies my Uncle George;
May he prove a tough morsel for old Nick to gorge!
Of what once gave him valor he here takes the place;
His spirit's run out, he has hidden his face.
He's not a green gosling; a much tougher bird;
In wit he compares with King George the Third."

"I cry quits, Tom," said Captain Ashbur, laughing heartily. "But see if I can do honor to Waters's memory:

"Spilt in this barrel is poor *Jack Waters:*
He'll *reign*, as is *due*, in the hearts of earth's daughters.
Leander's outshone by this valiant rover,
Who shouldered his hero and waded right over."

A few days after this, Mrs. Ashbur, happy to get into a tent which would give a little more elbow-room, exclaimed to her husband, "How delightful this will be, George! two good-sized rooms,—bed-room and parlor;" and she looked complacently down from her high perch on a pyramid composed of a barrel on top of a hogshead, where she was busied in hanging and arranging a bright curtain,

which was to serve as a partition-wall between the rooms.

Old black Phœbe held steady this rather insecure pedestal, while Clay and little Winny made themselves useful handing up tacks and curtain-cords.

"Where shall this bureau stand?" asked her husband, who was superintending the movements of two soldiers as they lifted in the bureau. "The glass has come to grief; so, Aunt Phœbe, you must polish up a tin pan and hang it here as a mirror for your Miss Agnes. Nothing like invention and philosophy to enable us to bear with such little misfortunes."

"Philosophy, indeed!" indignantly spoke the lady. "How am I to know when my collar is pinned straight, or my hair parted in the middle? Captain Ashbur, you must send for a glass by the very first train coming up." Then she continued: "Put the bureau to the right of the door. No; facing this way. That will do. Isn't my taste perfect in the choice of carpets, George? I think this one is a real work of art. How prettily the colors of the brown oak and red maple leaves contrast, and how naturally they are scattered over the dull green moss! even the broken twigs are not wanting; and the border of brown logs, with here and there a partridge or rabbit peeping out."

"A very appropriate design for autumn. For winter I suppose you have ordered one representing an ice-covered lake, surrounded by snow-fields, with a border of icicles."

"George, I believe you have no eye for artistic

effects. However, your notion would not be so bad for a summer carpet. Imagination might, with the aid of that design, cool off a hot summer day."

"Well, thanks to the spirits who preside over works of art, here is one which is injured beyond restoration. Whatever you may think of my taste, I assure you this cherished picture of Pharaoh's daughter has been a trial to me, and here it is utterly demolished. I hope Clay will use the pieces for a kite-tail, and so find consolation." Captain Ashbur had considerately spoken in French to avoid wounding the feelings of Phœbe and Clay. His wife gave a sigh of relief, while the gentleman, with shameless duplicity, showing the fragments to his son, cried, "Now isn't this too bad, Clay!—your lovely picture quite spoiled."

After one howl of distress, the boy gathered up the wreck, and proposed to Winny to act a play in which the princess should be torn to pieces by a crocodile in her endeavor to rescue Moses.

"Poor 'ittle Moses, he got tore up too," cried Winny. "Here's him poor 'ittle leg."

"Now what *is* to be done with the high posts of this confounded bedstead, unless we slit holes in the roof, and let them through like a stack of chimneys? We can't have it standing in the middle of the tent; and near the wall the ceiling is not high enough. I don't know what you meant by bringing the ridiculous thing along, Agnes."

"Why, George, have you forgotten? I told you when we were packing that those great posts would

be in the way. But you said, as we had this one it was no use going to the expense of buying another," said his wife, who was not one of those meek women ever ready to bear the blame of their husbands' faults.

"Mas' George, if I mought 'spress my 'pinion, I don't see what is to hinder your amputating those two posts which has to set circumadjacent to the tent wall," remarked Phœbe, holding the barrel with one hand, and wiping her perspiring face with her check apron.

"Sure enough, Phœbe; two heads are better than one, if one—does wear a turban. Drag the posts to the door and I will saw them off."

While engaged in the act of bedstead surgery, Captain Ashbur was surprised by visitors.

"Agnes," he cried, hurrying back from the door, "get down, do! Here comes Heron, bringing General Fairfax, the most elegant and punctilious gentleman in the army."

Alas! the notice was too short. Before Mrs. Ashbur could manage to descend, Tom and the general had entered. Casting his eye around, Heron espied his aunt on high when too late to retreat. With perfect *sang froid* he went through the ceremony of introduction:

"Aunt Agnes, come down-stairs and allow me to introduce you to General Fairfax, an old friend of your father. Mrs. Ashbur, general."

"Nothing more natural," said the gallant old gentleman, bowing low, "than to find Venus in the

ascendant, or St. Agnes looking down upon us sinners."

At this auspicious moment the top of the barrel gave way suddenly, and the fair St. Agnes disappeared from mortal view. But immediately coming into sight again,—at least displaying a bust view above her barrel envelope,—she waved her hand and bowed to her guest:

"General Fairfax can see I am highly delighted to welcome him, and hope soon to meet him on a more equal footing."

"Beauty is never more welcome than after a brief eclipse," rejoined the general.

Heron, assisted by Phœbe, had by this time lifted the barrel over the lady's head, and helped her to descend from the hogshead, Captain Ashbur being powerless between confusion and amusement.

"*Ora pro me*, St. Agnes," whispered Tom, as his aunt gave him a pinch as he landed her on the floor. "My aunt is greatly indebted to this accident for the pleasant sensation of being looked up to by an officer of such distinction."

Camp-chairs were produced, and soon the party were conversing like old friends. Mrs. Ashbur whispered a few words to Clay, who left the room, and soon after Cindy entered with a tray of biscuit and wine. The wine-glasses having in the move shared the fate of the mirror (a misfortune which Captain Ashbur, by the way, did not bear quite so philosophically as the former), tea-cups were substituted.

"This is the ancient and orthodox article for this purpose," remarked General Fairfax. "The wine-cup, the wine-cup bring hither!"

For some days after settling at the new post, which had been christened Fort Fairfax, the ladies were all too busy arranging their furniture (and even in manufacturing it) to spend time in visiting. After the carpenter had put shelves in the packing-boxes, the busy hands of the ladies covered the boxes neatly with glazed calico, tacked on a curtain for a door, and thus made sideboards, bookcases, and wardrobes. A smaller box set on end and thus finished off, with the addition of a bit of oil-cloth on top to represent the marble slab, was made to do duty as wash-stand.

In course of time a dining-room and kitchen built of upright logs, in Mexican style, were added to each establishment.

Of the half-dozen rush-bottom chairs with which the Ashburs had left San Antonio, three were smashed in a collision of wagons on the road. Mrs. Duval complained that the mules had lunched off of the seats of her chairs, as they hung temptingly behind the wagon. Mrs. Silvers, who, being an old campaigner, had brought along nothing but camp-stools which could be folded and packed in small compass, now went to work to help her neighbors in weaving list bottoms for their chairs.

Lieutenant Waters made himself popular among the ladies by constructing most comfortable seats out of half-barrels, sawing them down so as to leave

a hollowed-out back and embracing arms, and then weaving a bottom of rope. These frames when cushioned and covered with chintz proved to be the *ne plus ultra* of an easy-chair.

Directly in front of Major Silvers's tent grew a good-sized oak-tree, or perhaps we should rather say his tent was pitched just behind the tree. To the limbs he swung his hammock, and here enjoyed his pipe and the view of the valley below, in which the soldiers were busy constructing a brush fence in preparation for early gardening next spring.

Clay Ashbur, Winny Francisco, and little George, usually followed by Cindy with the baby in her arms, lived out of doors, gathering flowers, fishing with crooked pins, or picking up the coral-like seed of the *lignum-vitæ* tree for beads and marbles.

Mrs. Duval's pretty Irish nurse, Nora, leading Miss Cecelia and carrying little Antonio, was also frequently of the party; and Corporal O'Brian, when off duty, not infrequently managed to meet them in their wanderings.

A little beyond the top of the ridge, on the north side of which stood the tents of the officers, and therefore directly south of these tents, was the chosen site for the quarters, and preparations for building went busily forward. The quartermaster, Lieutenant Waters, and his men were at work on the foundations. But the first buildings erected were storehouses built of logs. At a little distance to the west the sutler made haste to put up his two-roomed store.

The hospital was, as is usual, to be the first sub-

stantial building finished. Then would follow the soldiers' quarters. So the prospect for anything better than tents for the officers was distant indeed.

Miss Comerford, charmed with the novelty of this nomadic life, was as busy as a dozen bees, making her father comfortable and learning to keep tent, as she called her housekeeping. Tom declared that his cousin tried a different receipt every day, and the colonel would soon have to send for another supply of cookery-books. In his cage, hanging from the front tent-pole, climbed and screamed the gray parrot with his red top-knot, the birthday gift of Lieutenant Hawthorn.

Paul Volney's little dog, José, constantly followed his mistress about the house when she failed to carry him on her arm or in her pocket.

The gentle armadillo had long ago shuffled off his mortal coil—or shell; but the vase-shaped basket presented by Captain Rubenstein graced the table in Kate's sitting-room. The stand on which the basket stood, by the way, was a piece of home-made furniture, fashioned, indeed, by Kate's own hands. Two circular boards, fitted on at each end of a three-foot pole, formed a frame, over which she had tacked blue cambric under white muslin, drawn together in the centre of the pole in hour-glass shape.

The giver of the basket—the spruce little blonde widower—could not (greatly to his regret) be stationed at this post, belonging, as he did, to the artillery, that arm of the service not being called for at Fort Fairfax.

Several new officers, however, had joined since the regiment left Knoctin Barracks, and, among others, one who had failed to make so favorable an impression on the ladies or his fellow-officers as he probably believed himself to have done.

His name was Boswell, which is about all that was known of him. Having exchanged into the Twelfth from another regiment, the officers were quite ignorant of his antecedents.

Mr. Boswell's manners were gentlemanly, his intelligence above the average; but there was wanting that genial frankness and *brother*liness which eminently characterized the members of the Twelfth.

Miss Kate confided to her cousin Tom that she detected a sinister cast or expression of the eye; but on being pressed by mischievous Tom for an exact explanation of the term sinister, could only reply, "Oh, you know perfectly well what I mean."

Hawthorn had become marked in his attentions to the beautiful daughter of his commanding officer; Dr. McBriar also, in his clumsy way, tried to win her favor; while Lieutenant Waters, indignant at what he considered Kate's unjustifiable coquetry, did his best in his friend's behalf by trying to rout them both.

CHAPTER III.

"MOTHER, mother, the Indians have come!" shouted Clay Ashbur, running into the house one day when they had been living some weeks at Fort Fairfax without having seen a red man.

"Hide me, mudder!" screamed curly-headed little George. "Dey get my stalp."

"Shame on you, St. George; you will never kill the dragon!" said his brother. "These Indians have not come to fight. Major Silvers says they have come to smoke the tomahawk of peace and bury the pipe of war."

"And they are not red at all," cried Winny, in an aggrieved tone; "just brown, like our Cindy." The child had evidently pictured to herself the red men with faces of brilliant scarlet.

The Indians had come to beg a great deal and trade a little, and had brought with them their squaws and pappooses, whose chief business it was to steal at every ghost of an opportunity. Their encampment was in sight, but at some little distance beyond the brook which meandered through the green prairie on the other side of the extensive lawn and garden plots lying at the foot of the slope on which stood the officers' tents.

The Comanche chiefs came into the garrison in full dress, though not in war paint. Earrings and

breastplates of large sea-shells (which had probably been obtained by traffic with the tribes dwelling near the Pacific), heads decorated with hawk-feathers, abundance of bead-embroidery on their buckskin garments, and the gracefully-draped blanket made up their court-dress. The blanket is as indispensable to an Indian's toilet as the cloak to the Spaniard's or the stove-pipe hat to the Englishman's.

The long black hair of the men was worn braided in one queue down the back, in many cases spliced out with a horse-tail to reach the desired length. These long braids were ornamented by pieces of silver, beginning with one the size of a small saucer and gradually tapering down to a five-cent piece. The women displayed no ornaments, and wore their hair short.

"They are an ugly-looking set, take them at the best, especially the women," said Mrs. Silvers; "and I fail to perceive that dignity and sternness so associated with our ideas of their race. Whatever other tribes may be like, the Comanches resemble a set of good-natured mulattoes."

"I thought Indians seldom even smiled, and just hear how those undignified creatures are laughing," said Miss Comerford, whose preconceived notions of the red men were fast dissolving.

Colonel Comerford, wishing to purchase a riding-horse for his daughter, was somewhat astonished that Yellow Wolf refused to bargain and generously offered the pony as a gift.

"Me big chief, you big chief. Me make present

you of horse; you make present me one seventy dollar. Uh!"

This was nearly double the value of the pony, as Mr. Yellow Wolf, who was something of a fox, well knew. So likewise did the colonel, and yet this speech was made with an air so innocent, such evident contempt of bargaining between two such exalted characters, that the white man was betrayed into giving his consent before he had time for second thought. After this the commander at Fort Fairfax positively, though politely, declined all gifts from these unsophisticated children of nature.

Miss Comerford had the honor of entertaining the *medicine man* during a long morning call, and to pass the time allowed him to look over her handsome volume of illustrations from Scott's novels. Hawthorn's Spanish (a smattering of which language these Indians have), together with a few Indian words which he had picked up, enabled him to act as interpreter. The red M.D. was highly delighted with the engravings, and made the modest request that some half-dozen which particularly struck his fancy should be cut out and given to him. In return he offered the white squaw, or *Gold-headed Pigeon*, as he poetically christened Miss Kate, a wonderful charm made of a sea-shell cut into the shape of a heart. This amulet would secure for the wearer the affection of her favorite *brave*, and absolutely exterminate all her rivals.

Gold-headed Pigeon declined to sacrifice "Cœur de Lion and the Disguised Prince of Scotland,"

"Queen Elizabeth and Amy Robsart," "Caleb Balderstone in the Act of Stealing the Roast Goose from the Spit for his Master's Breakfast," and the "Duel Scene between King Charles and Everhard in Woodstock Park," all of which were coveted by this art-loving Indian.

And the interpreter was indignant that even a wild Comanche should be so blind as to presume that *this* lady had need of other charms than those so bountifully bestowed on her by nature.

Next evening the officers took their wives behind them, riding-horses being scarce, and rode by moonlight down the grassy slope and across the brook to the Indian encampment.

As her father would not let her try the new horse by night, Kate had accepted a seat behind her cousin, to whom she was forced to cling with both arms as his horse went dancing down the hill.

"Don't hug so tight, Kate," laughed Tom; "you squeeze the breath out of a fellow," as he spurred the horse to a leap over the stream.

The pale-faces had taken this ride by night in order to witness an Indian dance. This was not to be a war-dance, but one in honor of some great chief who had gone to the happy hunting-ground.

Twenty or thirty Comanches massed in a compact crowd, with their musician in the centre performing on the primitive instrument of a gourd filled with pebbles, and all joining their voices in a monotonous "Yah! yah!" kept time by hopping up and down, seldom changing places.

Now and then the music (?) swelled into a mournful howl, and occasionally one of the dancers, overcome by his feelings,—or something stronger,—would fall back in a sort of swoon, and be carried out of the ring by his friends. This part of the performance and the shouting reminded Captain Ashbur of scenes he had witnessed, when a boy, at a Methodist camp-meeting.

"I scarcely think that this style of music in a man's soul would necessarily unfit him for treason, stratagem, and spoil," remarked Mr. Hawthorn.

"No music, not even the lofty strains of Yankee Doodle, has yet had that effect on the Comanches," said Major Silvers.

"How sad the thought that all these little children —and pretty creatures they are—should be unbaptized!" said Kate Comerford, who, during her convent life, had become a Catholic, greatly to Mrs. Silvers's delight.

"Have the poor creatures any religion of their own,—the grown-up Indians, I mean?" inquired Mrs. Ashbur. "Or has any effort been made to Christianize them?"

"Not likely," said Dr. McBriar, "when we care apparently so little for our religion as to live like heathen, with never a chaplain at one post in ten. That Indians *may* be made Christians is proved by the civilized and Catholic tribes living at and around El Paso. They are better people than the Mexicans. One beautiful and pious custom among them we witnessed as regularly as Christmas came around.

On Christmas eve they scale the mountains and kindle bonfires, which burn all night in honor of the birth of our Lord."

"I always admire these out-of-door religious observances practised in Catholic countries," continued the doctor. "Our religion never thinks of straying beyond the church-door. That man who should take his faith so to heart as to erect a wayside shrine would be thought too childish, and yet we must become as little children."

"My dealings with the Indians," remarked the guide, who happened to be of the party, "has been sich as to raise a doubt whether they carries sich things as souls about 'em. Them souls is but small potatoes which don't projuce gratitude enough to keep ther hands out of your pockets while you are in the act of feeding 'em. The highest flight of nobleness I ever hearn of among 'em was the chief that preferred death to captivity, and actually had the grace to kill hisself as well as his squaw and child rather than be held prisoners. That man was the most civilized Injun *I* ever met with. His conduct rather shuck my settled belief that they were all evil spirits and made by the devil."

This man had lost a wife and also his twin-brother at the hands of these savages, and was bitterly opposed to any amicable relations being established between them and the whites.

"My old mother," he continued, "used to tell me, when she were scrubbing of me up of a Saturday night, that cleanliness was near akin to godliness.

Now, on that showin', these dirty creturs is a long shot removed from heaven. And it is my private opinion, publicly expressed, that they had best be left to wallow in the mire. You can't touch pitch with your dainty hands, miss," turning, as he spoke, to Miss Comerford, "and be ondefiled."

CHAPTER IV.

AMONG the officers who had joined the Twelfth since the sojourn of our friends at Knocktin was Lieutenant Brown, who had a very pretty little wife,—a lady more noted, however, for her love of admiration than for more desirable qualities. She was very sprightly, and seemed desirous of sharing with Miss Comerford the attentions of the young gentlemen. Failing in the attempt to draw off the devotion of Mr. Hawthorn, the lady consoled herself by getting up something which savored entirely too much of a flirtation with Mr. Boswell. Walks and rides and readings—Boswell was an accomplished reader—threw these two together oftener than was, to say the least, in good taste. Of this a word farther on.

Mrs. Silvers, assisted by Miss Comerford, determined to gather the children of the soldiers (who were running wild and growing up with little more knowledge of the teachings of their religion than so many prairie-dogs) into a kind of school, to which the

ladies would devote at least two hours of each morning.

Mrs. Ashbur and Mrs. Duval begged that their small flocks might be admitted (even at the risk of their becoming Catholics), for it was understood that in this school the children were especially drilled in the rudiments of that faith. Tom Heron said that the ladies followed the style of the ancient philosophers in holding their séances out of doors.

Weather permitting, as it usually did, the shade of the oak-tree in front of Mrs. Silvers's door, or the *lignum vitæ* grove by the side of Colonel Comerford's tent, with the children seated on the grass, were the walks of these professors.

When the children had been sufficiently drilled, it was a sweet and touching thing to hear their clear voices in hymns of praise floating over the wild prairie, where only the whoop of the savage or howl of the wolf had been heard before.

On Sundays it at length became a habit with the ladies to visit the families of the soldiers and read with them the gospel of the day and say the Litany or the rosary. The Catholic soldiers, mostly Irish or German, gladly assembled to listen and join in these devotions. And it was amusing to see a class of bearded and rough-looking men standing in a row to answer the catechism questions with the children.

Some bon-bons distributed among the little ones, and books of travel, biography, and well-chosen novels given to the men, helped to make these meet-

ings a welcome break in the monotony of garrison life.

Mr. Hawthorn, who was half a Catholic, easily persuaded himself that it was his duty to act as escort to the ladies and occasional assistant in these Sunday exercises. And Mr. Waters, though a staunch Presbyterian, felt it incumbent on him to be present, to make sure that his brother-officer smuggled not Cupid into the fold in guise of a cherub.

While the others were saying the rosary, Waters tried to avoid any participation in the *Avês* by preaching to himself long sermons on the doctrines of predestination and total depravity, heartily wishing Volney would come along to look after his own affairs. On once venturing to make some delicate suggestion as to what Volney's opinion might be concerning the frequent presence of Hawthorn by her side, he was met with such a look of blank astonishment from Miss Kate as left him no wish to interfere again in that direction.

In these Sunday meetings Corporal O'Brien and pretty Nora Ryan read from the same book, and their rich voices sounded in charming unison in the hymns, the brogue not interfering in the least with the harmony. If a suspicion of earthly love crept into *their* devotions, let us hope they were forgiven.

Even denser ignorance than had been supposed possible was discovered to exist among nominal Catholics.

One man reckoned desertion from the army as one of the seven deadly sins. Another thought the

present year was reckoned from the time of the flood, and was corrected by a bright boy, who broached the novel idea that we reckoned time from the discovery of America by George Washington!

The cardinal virtues Master Clay Ashbur naturally supposed to be virtues peculiar to the cardinals, while Gustavus Duval had managed to get the fall of the angels and the Falls of Niagara so inextricably entangled that it was impossible to find where one began or the other left off. The fall of Adam, too, was imagined to be a sudden descent from the tree from which he was plucking the forbidden fruit.

As the evenings lengthened, little social reunions, with music, dancing, or the next best method of innocent relaxation,—plays and charades,—helped to make pleasant the life at this far-away post.

"Mr. Volney has arrived, do you know?" said Mrs. Silvers to her friend, Mrs. Ashbur, as the two, preceded by the flock of children, were walking over the prairie near sunset, stopping now and then to gather flowers.

"Yes, and at a most inopportune time. He will be ready to welcome the returning fishing-party. We must manage to undeceive him at the earliest opportunity; if, indeed, he is under any delusion. I sometimes think Mr. Volney knows very well that his marriage was prevented. Tom has probably been merely hoaxing us into believing the deception was carried out. It is too incredible. But here he comes."

"Welcome to the wilderness, Mr. Volney," said Mrs. Silvers, shaking hands. "I hope you are not sorry to join us again, though, from the present state of affairs," pointing towards the buildings in progress, "it will be a long time before we can sing 'Out of the Wilderness.'"

"The ladies of the *Twelfth* would make any wilderness blossom like the rose," was the gallant reply. "And I shall expect to find manna and all other desirable things here. But how happens it that this fishing-party has been so imprudent as to venture to such a distance? We recognized traces of hostile Indians, on our way up from San Antonio, between this and Fort Mason."

"Oh, there can be no danger. Of course the gentlemen went armed, and, I think, also took a small escort," was Mrs. Ashton's reply. "Here they come now, and in some disorder."

Mrs. Brown, indeed, was supported as she rode by her husband's arm. Mrs. Duval, also, was very pale as she dismounted, and she embraced her children, who flew to meet her, in silence.

Lieutenant Waters, it is true, hurried up with his usual good-natured smile to welcome his old friend. But Captain Ashbur, with merely a nod to his wife, and a hurried "Glad to see you, Volney," galloped on to meet Colonel Comerford, who was seen approaching from the direction of the buildings on the hill.

As the rest of the fishing-party came up it was observed that Lieutenant Boswell looked sulky, Dr.

McBriar half angry, while Hawthorn, who was talking earnestly as he rode by the side of Miss Comerford, certainly carried his arm in a sling. Something had evidently gone wrong.

"What has happened, doctor?" asked Mrs. Ashbur. But that gentleman hastily shook hands with Volney and rode on, paying no sort of attention to the lady's question.

"Mr. Waters, can *you* tell us the meaning of all this?" exclaimed Mrs. Silvers, impatiently, as she laid a detaining hand on his arm. "Or is it your rôle to disappear in grim silence like the rest? Why, this is like a troubled dream, in which all the shadows vanish when addressed. You are worse than a company of ghosts, for they do speak when spoken to."

"Ladies, I am not at all anxious to vanish from your presence, for the next thing is I must stand in the august presence of our *comandante*, and I would cheerfully walk ten miles to avoid him in his present humor. You two, who wisely stayed at home on this unlucky day, must relinquish all hope of joining in any future fishing-excursion. The colonel will never again trust us half a mile from the post. I am sure I feel as if I ought never to be trusted with firearms again."

"Mr. Waters, if you do not come to the point at once and tell us a straight story, we shall begin to suspect you have been trusted with more than your share of fire-*water* to-day," retorted Mrs. Ashbur.

"Don't be so unkind, my dear madam. I am fasting from all save sin. It is hard on a fellow to

have to report, in presence of ladies, an engagement in which all the blame rests with the commissioned and all the laurels have been toted off by the non-commissioned officer.

"Tired out with too much success in fishing (for the stupid catfish in that stupid stream were as stupid as we have been, and as easily caught napping), Mrs. Brown, to vary the exercises,—and, by the way, she is a good shot, and never——"

"Hangs fire, as you do," said Mrs. Ashbur, with a sigh of resignation.

"Well," resumed Waters, "Mrs. Brown proposed shooting at a mark. She had abstracted her husband's pistol from his pocket while he was baiting her hook; and we all followed her lead, climbing the bank and walking some rods from the top of it before we found a tree to make a target of, leaving only Ashbur and Francisco, who were busy trying to tire out an immense catfish they had hooked by racing up and down the bank with him; for if you attempt to land one of these cats too soon, snap will go your line——"

"That is exactly what our long-tried patience has done," groaned Mrs. Silvers.

"After exhausting her revolver," he continued, without noticing the interruption, "and—but I won't stop to tell how often she hit the bull's-eye——"

"For which omission receive our heartfelt thanks," interpolated Mrs. Ashbur.

"Mrs. Brown next demanded Boswell's, who (fool that he is) made no demur. Mrs. Duval and Miss

Kate now entered the lists. Hawthorn, I will do him the justice to say, refused at first to yield his gun, and was only overcome at last by the bewitching smiles and beseeching eyes of Miss Kate. (She is enough to distract any man; and what right has she to be playing the witch in that direction?)" The last remark was in a subdued parenthesis, but was caught by Mrs. Ashbur, who glanced uneasily at her friend. Still, both were too eager to discover what had occurred on the fishing-ground to go into an explanation of the affair at Knocktin.

"Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Duval now made a raid on McBriar, who stoutly refused to give up his loaded gun.

"'Where is the danger?' sneered Boswell. 'You will still have your lancet for defence against the mosquitoes.'

"'There is, perhaps, but one chance in fifty of Indians turning up,' said McBriar, with a glance of contempt at the other, 'but I do not choose to trust too much to the nine-and-forty. We are not a set of school-boys, to be led by the nose by the (beg pardon, ladies) weaker sex.'

"Upon this Mrs. Brown grew more determined to have that gun by fair means or foul.

"Oh, I forgot to acknowledge that, after denying I had a pistol about me, I had allowed the ladies to tease me out of mine after Miss Kate suggested I was more afraid of Indians than she was. Big goose that I was, I was actually ridiculed out of acting with common sense. Mrs. Brown, after begging in vain

that the doctor would give us a specimen of his own skill, slyly hinted that, perchance, a gun was less familiar in his hand than some other blood-letting instruments. This piqued the old gentleman, who is a capital shot, into raising the gun to his shoulder. But her look of triumph recalled his wits, and he lowered without discharging it. The next move of this fair strategist was to be taken by the beauty of the silver mounting of the piece and ask to see it more closely. This proved too much for even the surgeon's prudence; vanity prevailed, and the lady was permitted to touch the gun.

"Presto! that gun changed hands, and was actually pointed at its owner when he made a motion to seize it! Then, aiming at the tree—crack! crack! went both barrels. The rage of McBriar when Mrs. Brown smilingly returned his gun was awful. Should she ever fall sick, she won't be treated to homœopathic doses! Boswell, in the mean time, had demanded of Corporal O'Brien, who stood at a little distance watching the shooting, a musket on which he was leaning. O'Brien respectfully declined yielding it. 'How dare you refuse, fellow?' cried Boswell, with clenched teeth. 'Sir,' said the soldier, 'I have a sneaking notion that it is not prudent at all, at all, to lave the ladies definseless, as it ware.'

"'What right have you to set yourself up as wiser than your superiors?' and as the man took a step backward, still grasping the gun, Boswell, red in the face with passion, raised his riding-whip as if

to strike. O'Brien lifted his left arm to ward off the blow.

"Just at this critical moment we were startled by a stamping of hoofs and a sharp cry from Hawthorn, who threw himself in front of Miss Kate,—not a second too soon either, for the arrow that might have killed her struck his left arm.

"O'Brien dashed forward and discharged both barrels at the Indians, for not less than seven of the devils were in sight. Of course they had been watching us, and hoped we had exhausted our ammunition, or at least would not have time to reload. So you see O'Brien's shot was all that saved us; for though Brown and I sprang on our horses crying 'Charge!' our empty guns would not have frightened the savages. Mrs. Duval acted like a soldier's wife: she pointed her gun at the enemy instead of fainting away.

"Francisco and Ashbur now came running to the rescue, but the savages, who seldom risk their precious skins in fair fight, had turned tail and were out of sight."

"Where was my nephew, Tom Heron, all this while?" inquired Mrs. Ashbur.

"Heron brought up the rear of the reinforcement, and it is my belief that he was using his toes for bait in a new style of fishing, for he ran up the bank with one boot in his hand.

"He says he had stepped upon a bunch of cactus, and was trying to ease the sting of the nettles by a mud-poultice.

"Boswell swears he will have O'Brien broken for raising his gun on an officer. But Kate says she can testify that the soldier raised the left arm and grasped the gun with the right.

"We have persuaded Boswell to let the matter drop; but if black looks mean anything, O'Brien had best take care of himself. That man will not easily forgive a soldier who adds to the crime of resisting his sovereign will the offence of proving himself the wiser man."

Thus ended Mr. Waters's long-drawn-out narration.

It may here be mentioned that Mr. Volney's greeting of Miss Comerford after their long separation had been both grave and embarrassed, while the young lady scarcely blushed and seemed preoccupied. Waters wondered which stood first in her thoughts at that moment, the man to whom she had given her hand (as he believed) or the one who had just saved her life.

Volney certainly experienced a pang of jealousy and felt that Hawthorn had usurped his rights, including the right to get wounded in her cause.

Only his failure to secure an honorable part in the day's exploit and the pain in his foot kept Heron's enjoyment of the beginning of the complications and blunders within bounds.

That very evening all the fishermen of the day were summoned to the august presence of their angry superior officer, where they stood looking like truant schoolboys as he paced the floor and gave vent to his displeasure:

"A pretty set I have about me to be trusted with the protection of women! It is no fault of yours that my daughter is not a corpse and Brown and Duval widowers. It looks as if they were anxious to be rid of their wives.

"A sweet report I shall have to make at headquarters of our first brush with the Indians! The Twelfth will become noted for prudence and valor! You deserve, one and all, to be reduced to the ranks, and if I had my way, one of the set at least should be made to change coats with O'Brien." This last with a look at Boswell, which that gentleman set down to O'Brien's credit.

The colonel went on to remark that the soldier was the only one of the party with sense enough to keep firearms out of the hands of women, and he even mumbled something to himself about doubting "whether the others had enough to keep their fingers out of the fire." He was heard quite distinctly to advise his officers to give up the profession of arms and take to fishing for a livelihood.

"Och, thin," said Heron aside, who cared little for his own share of the blame in seeing older officers snubbed, "sure, we are only *bate* by O'Brien."

"Lieutenant Hawthorn, you richly deserve more than you got for yielding your judgment to a woman's smiles. However," added the colonel, turning quickly on his heel and taking Hawthorn's sound hand, "I thank you with all my heart for saving the life of my child." As he spoke, tears stood in the father's eyes.

Corporal O'Brien was called in and questioned as to how he came to set up his judgment in opposition to his superiors:

"What reason had you to suspect danger?"

"To sphake truth, colonel, it was all owing to a drame Nora Ryan had sint her, moreover," said the man.

"A dream?" exclaimed the bewildered colonel; "and who, pray, is this Nora who dreams to such good purpose?"

"She is the natest and handsomest lass this side of Ould Erin, she is. She begged me to kape me eyes about me the day, for she had a moighty ugly drame intirely of seeing Miss Kate in her weddin'-robe and veil; and that, you know, colonel, signifies death."

"I know nothing of the sort, you donkey. So it was faith in dreams and not a soldier-like foresight which prompted your action. You shall have a sergeant's straps all the same. Now march!"

CHAPTER V.

MRS. SILVERS, Mrs. Duval, and Mrs. Ashbur were sitting next morning in Mrs. Ashbur's front room. A *norther* had sprung up in the night, and was still blowing, making the fire which glowed on the hearth and was reflected by the small brass andirons and fender very comfortable.

The ladies looked grave and troubled. Mrs. Duval remarked:

"This imprudence, to give it no harsher title, must be brought to a termination ere too late. We must endeavor to rescue our erring sister before she takes that one step which can never be retraced."

"So I say," assented Mrs. Silvers. "When a married woman so far forgets her dignity as to flirt openly with a young man, and then puts the finishish touch to matters by casting herself into his arms to faint when her husband's were just as handy, as you say Mrs. Brown did yesterday, why it is high time she was taken in hand and brought to a sense of propriety."

Then spoke Mrs. Ashbur:

"Our regiment has never been disgraced by a breath of scandal attaching to any of our ladies, and we owe it to ourselves to preserve its honor. In general society we can easily drop a woman who forgets the respect due her sex for the sake of attracting the admiration

of fops, or who ventures on these slippery ways through sheer thoughtlessness and want of something to engage her mind, if such women can be truly said to have any minds. But in army life we are so thrown together that we are obliged to be as intimate as sisters. So Mrs. Brown must be plainly told that we cannot permit her to compromise us."

"Yes," said Mrs. Silvers, "we can simply say to her, should she refuse to listen to our remonstrances, that she must choose at once between Mr. Boswell's flattery and our esteem. For, in this instance, we have the power in our own hands, and can prevent mischief by threatening to have nothing more to do with her."

"What can possess women supposed to be ladies to show such lack of delicacy,—to risk so much!" exclaimed Mrs. Ashbur. "I am sometimes tempted to think they are actually possessed by evil spirits. Does it come from too much novel-reading? In many books of fiction such things are treated entirely too much as matters of course. And heroines are permitted to go dancing along as near the edge of a dizzy precipice as possible, and the writers seem to think that all is well so they escape going over."

"Another cause may be found in the fact that instead of frowning down the incipient stages of these flirtations, women usually content themselves with animadversions on such behavior in private, and yet continue to countenance these imprudent ones by associating with them," said Mrs. Silvers. "I really

believe it is altogether vanity and thoughtlessness in Mrs. Brown; she is thinking of no harm."

That afternoon, when Mrs. Ashbur had no one except Kate Comerford with her, who always felt as much at home here and with Mrs. Silvers as in her own father's house, they were suddenly interrupted in their conversation on the subject of the fishing-party, Kate's narrow escape, and the coming of Mr. Volney by Tom Heron's appearance.

"Come, Aunt Agnes! if you and Cousin Kate want to see fun, just follow me, and you shall witness the comedy of 'Infantry on Horseback.' A scouting-party is to be dispatched after our late visitors, and half of the men never put leg over a horse before, it is safe to say. I am detailed for this scout, and we shall soon teach these Comanches not to intrude on our picnics without a special invitation."

The ladies were soon ready for the walk to the place where the *riding-school*, as Tom called it, was held.

The scene was sufficiently amusing. Most of the men approached a horse with the utmost caution, as if stalking a deer, apparently thinking that he must by no means discover their intention of mounting until they were safe in the saddle. Several mounted from the wrong side, while one original fellow climbed up from behind, or, as he termed it, "boarded his craft from the stern."

"Where is that man leading his horse?" cried Lieutenant Volney, who was superintending this prairie circus and had been appointed to take com-

mand of the expedition, much to the chagrin of the *fishermen.* This honor was awarded him simply because he had *not* formed one of that wise party.

The soldier alluded to had now reached a stump, and, thus assisted, managed to scramble up.

"You ninny!" called out Volney, half laughing, "do you propose to carry that stump along with you, or do you expect to find stumps strewn along the prairie for your benefit whenever you may catch a tumble?"

"No, lieutenant. When we once get under way I shall mount from the piles of Injuns you are safe to send to kingdom come."

"A neat turn of a compliment, hey, Volney?" observed Tom, stepping up to his side. "I have brought the ladies out to admire your cavalry."

Volney bowed,—that short, crisp bow usually indulged in by military men,—and he earnestly hoped that the horse would spill his cautious rider, who had dared to crack a joke at his expense in the presence of ladies.

The mounting was but the beginning of the fun, the order to *trot* being followed by the rolling off of many of the riders like so many logs. One man in his fall caught his steed by the hind-leg to stop him, and narrowly escaped a broken head.

The gallop still further thinned the ranks, and a sudden "Halt!" from Volney was promptly obeyed by the quadrupeds, while more than one of the bipeds kept on, regardless alike of discipline or horses' heads.

On each trial, however, there was a perceptible improvement. The soldiers enjoyed the fun, and were determined not to let their bad horsemanship stand in the way of the eagerly anticipated Indian chase.

"Of all farces," said Volney as soon as he could spare a moment from his duty, "this mounting of infantry is the poorest. The government should add several regiments of cavalry to the service and place them at these frontier posts. Four regiments of cavalry and one of mounted rifles is a beggarly allowance for such an extent of frontier. However, there is not a ghost of a chance of our overtaking the Comanches."

"Oh, I do trust there is not!" earnestly exclaimed Miss Kate, with clasped hands and a suspicion of a tear in her blue eyes.

"Is that anxiety for me, or is most of it for her cousin?" was Paul Volney's thought. What he said was this:

"That is unkind of you, when Tom and I have our spurs yet to win. Farewell; perhaps I may not see you again;" and he pressed Kate's little hand in both of his. But, noticing that she started and turned pale at his words, he hastened to add: "I mean before we leave, as we get off before daylight to-morrow. Of course we shall come back again all right in four or five days. And I will engage to eat all the Indians we find."

This was kindly said to keep up Kate's courage. To himself he said, "She surely loves me, this agitation proves it;" and then he sighed.

CHAPTER VI.

ALL the children, with Kate Comerford in their midst, were seated, on one pleasant day, in the *lignum vitæ* grove. For, except while a "norther" lasted, which was usually about three days, with intervals of two or three weeks between the "northers," the weather, even in mid-winter, resembled the Indian summer of the North.

To-day the occupation of the company consisted in the making of rosaries out of the coral-like berries of the *lignum vitæ* tree. These seed, naturally as hard as a rock, had been steeped in vinegar to render them pierceable.

Miss Kate, assisted by Nora Ryan and Mrs. Ashbur's nurse Cindy, was engaged in perforating the berries, and the children in stringing them, putting in, after each decade of coral *Avés*, a prettily carved ebony bead for the *Pater Noster*. The ebony beads had been shaped by the skilful hands of Mr. Hawthorn, assisted by that good Presbyterian, Jack Waters.

When asked by young Heron how he reconciled it to his conscience to assist in the manufacture of Catholic rosaries, the reply was that if not supplied with these playthings, the Catholics would be at some other nonsense quite as objectionable.

Mrs. Silvers had sent for and received from San

Antonio, by the train in which Volney had come up, some small crucifixes, already blessed, to attach to these primitive rosaries.

"Nora," said Clay Ashbur (speaking in a stage-aside), "here is a letter for you. I don't like the man that gave it to me, but I will keep my promise and 'liver it without letting any one see me." And Clay turned his back on the rest of the party while he handed Nora the note, carefully folded in his handkerchief.

"What is that, Nora?" asked Miss Comerford. "Not a clandestine correspondence?"

"Why, 'tis surprised that I am, Master Clay, that you should not like Sergeant O'Brien; he sets great store by you," said ready Nora, hoping thus to throw dust into Miss Kate's bright eyes.

"*I* never said I did not like O'Brien," declared the boy, who of course did not suspect Nora's motives for wishing to obscure the young lady's vision. "He is my friend; he shows me how to beat the drum, and is making me a big kite. Why, he belongs to my own company, he does,—Company K. It was not O'Brien I meant, but Lieuten——"

"Oh," interrupted the blushing Nora, "Luten, of B company, is no favorite of mine either; faith, he is the manest soldier in the garrison. Run, Master Clay; there goes O'Brien now with the big kite he's made for you, with an Indian painted on one side and a buffalo on the other."

This created the desired diversion from the subject of the writer of the mysterious letter. But Miss

Comerford was not satisfied, and the first time she caught Clay alone she insisted on knowing who gave him that note.

"Well, I reckon he would not mind my just telling you, Cousin Kate; but I won't say his name. I'll just observe he is the man I heard you say had a *crime-ister* eye. I asked him once what crimeister meant, but he didn't know. I never told him, though, you said that about his eye, for father says it is not gentlemanly to repeat what ladies say before you about the young men."

"What in the name of common sense can the boy mean?" exclaimed Kate. But, suddenly, the truth dawned on her mind. The letter must have been from Lieutenant Boswell, the expression of whose eye she remembered to have defined as *sinister*. What could a correspondence between these two portend? She must do all she could to defeat any plots against O'Brien's peace of mind.

"Nora," said Sergeant O'Brien, as, standing on the outside, he leaned his arms on the sill of Mrs. Duval's kitchen window and talked with his sweetheart, while that pretty but coquettish maid stood ironing the white, beruffled slips of little Antonio,—"Nora, I must be let to have a sarious talk wi' you when you shall be through your work this avening. Meet me by the live-oak tree forninst the hospital ruins." Thus the soldiers designated the unfinished buildings.

"Perhaps," said Nora, tossing her head as she

turned to take up a hot iron, for her lover's tone was none too polite.

"Don't fail me," said he, "for I have that upon me heart which must and will make itself heard."

Nora paused in her work after O'Brien left her, pondering on his last words, which had left an uncomfortable impression on her mind. And during that absorbing revery the hot iron left a decidedly unpleasant impression on the very front width of Master Antonio's white slip.

The young girl cared too much for the good-looking soldier not to keep the appointment. As they walked slowly back and forth in the shadow of the wall about dusk that evening, O'Brien thus proceeded to relieve his feelings:

"Nora darlint, I want you to promise me to have nothing further to do with that villain. I've remonsthrated wi' you, and I've coaxed you; but now it has arove at that pass that I must take a stand moreover. You've got now to choose betwane us. I'll have no high-fliers hanging around my lass,—no wasps buzzing about my rose. And shure it's youself as is the rose of the perrairy and the darlint o' me heart. Oh, my dearest, niver let vanity blind ye, or the love o' tasing mislead ye. You ought to be having the sinse to see that a girl in your station o' life cannot resave intentions from such as he without injury to her good name."

"O'Brien, it's you are the most jealous lad in the regiment. Only last month it was Sergeant Kane I

was not to spake to. I fear it's little peace o' me life I'd enjoy if I ever came to marry you."

"Whist! Nora dear, the weddin'-ring is a shure cure for jealousy; you might lade me by the nose, and do as you plased, once you let me slip it over your finger."

"Where would be the joy in such a tame sort of love? Such is no more to be likened to the love that would win me heart than a barn-door fowl to an eagle. The very sparkle and fun will be snuffed out of me life when I no longer have the delight o' tasing you, Mick, and o' seeing your fists clinch and your eye strike fire whenever I smile upon another lad."

"That may be fun to you, Nora, but 'tis death to me, as the frog said when the boys beraved him of his skin."

"More be token, O'Brien, why should I stoop to listen to the likes of you, a common soldier, when there's the choice of being an officer's lady offered me?"

"Nora Ryan, are you fey? or what has come to you, that common sinse and you have parted company? If Lieutenant Boswell was so lost to a sinse of what is due his station as to offer to make you his wife, it's not in the Twelfth Regiment he'd long remain, for his brother-officers would soon kick him out of it. How would you fale now making pretinse to be a lady, and sitting up beside such born ladies as Mrs. Ashbur and Mrs. Duval and the lave o' them? Mark my words, that *omadhoun* has no such honest intentions towards a poor Irish girl. Nothing

else save disgrace comes of such flutterations, the parties being so onaqual."

"Let me see the man, gentle or simple, who dares to mintion disgrace and Nora Ryan in the same breath. He'd have nade to order his wig, for the two hands of me would be afther laving him so bare he'd think the Indians had scalped him!" cried angry Nora. "'And if it is me as is not good enough for such a mane creture as you think the leftenant, why, thin, I must be beneath the notice of so suparior a person as Sergeant O'Brien."

"Not good enough, Nora *mavourneen!* The likes of him are not worthy to kiss the ground your dear feet tread upon. But, Nora, avich, there's a fitness and propriety in these things; the hawk should not mate with the dove. And, to tell you the thruth, I truly consave it is more to bedivil me than aught else—for he has an old grudge at me—that the man has set himself to bothering around my swateheart," said O'Brien.

"Never you mind, Mick," answered Nora, slightly pacified, for the girl began to think she had ventured far enough in her love of teasing, although it is barely possible that her actions had been somewhat influenced by her ambition to become a lady.

"Go to your rest in peace," she continued. "I'll not hearken to the note of the hawk,—he may swoop down upon some other chicken. But if I am a dove, sure it is not the most dove-like mate I'm afther choosing." And Nora laughed heartily.

The reconciled lovers now bade farewell, and the

sound that attended the parting good-night was not altogether like the cooing of doves.

The happy sergeant went off singing,—

"Oh, Nora, me darling, you've tased me enough."

CHAPTER VII.

LIEUTENANT HAWTHORN was lingering over a game of chess with Colonel Comerford one evening, while the colonel's fair daughter sat near them singing ballads to the touch of her light guitar. The elder player had, undoubtedly, the advantage, for his opponent was less interested in plans for taking the colonel's castle, or giving check to his king, than in the more intricate problem of winning the citadel of his daughter's heart and checkmating that American sovereign yclept Paul Volney.

As he took the bishop's pawn with his knight, he found himself ardently wishing that his rival might be of one mind with his namesake, St. Paul, and wisely elect to remain in a state of single blessedness. This was one way out of the difficulty. There was no hope, in this wilderness, of the intervention of some other pretty girl as a lure to draw off Volney's volatile affections. That he *was* fickle-hearted Hawthorn felt assured. He never before so felt the want of a sister, whose services would have been invaluable to him at this time.

"Check!" said the colonel.

The young man, after making his move, thus went on with his self-communings:

"Could fate be so unkind as to have set aside for another the only woman who has found entrance into my——"

"Your castle!" interpolated the elder player.

"No, my heart," continued Hawthorn, in his musings, yielding the castle as of minor importance. "I am not yet thoroughly convinced on all points, and cannot, therefore, declare myself a Catholic; still dispensations have been granted. Would it, I wonder, be necessary to wait until one could be obtained from the——"

"*King* in check again," said the colonel.

"Not the king, but the pope. Or would not the consent of the bishop suffice——"

"Your bishop is mine!" cried the player whose thoughts centered in the game.

"And yours, too, is the queen of my heart," sighed the player whose thoughts did *not*, under his breath.

"And here I give you checkmate!" said the colonel, chuckling.

"I fear, indeed, you will!" said Kate Comerford's lover aloud, quite forgetting himself.

The gentleman whose son-in-law he aspired to become looked up in surprise.

"Will be disgusted with my stupidity this evening in giving you too easy a victory," continued Hawthorn, as if his voice had merely happened to fall after the wrong word.

A servant belonging to Major Silvers here entered with a note inviting the colonel to step over and help Ashbur, Duval, and himself to fight their Mexican battles over again. They wished to celebrate the anniversary of the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma while discussing some choice champagne.

"Excuse me, Hawthorn; your revenge will await you to-morrow evening," said the old gentleman, while the young man gladly hastened to help him on with his light overcoat.

When her father had gone Miss Kate inquired, "Why are you not also invited, Mr. Hawthorn? or is it that you do not care to have a rehash of your battles?"

"Unfortunately, Miss Comerford, I have not as yet had the good luck to assist in a battle at first hand. The Mexican war had not the grace to wait until I joined. When the veterans, as we dub the soldiers of that war, meet together for the purpose of glorifying, we *plebs*—such as Waters, Volney, and myself—stand in the background, gnawing our lips with envy, or, as Waters expresses it, with our mouths watering for some of the fine chances of distinction we have missed." Then he continued in a somewhat hurried manner,—

"Army life in time of peace is often dull and monotonous,—a rough and isolated existence for such ladies as have chosen to share a soldier's hard lot. I sometimes wonder how the wives of our officers have been so self-denying as to relinquish the

comforts and elegances of civil life for the sake of their husbands. A soldier should indeed be able to appreciate as it deserves the high compliment paid him. However, this much may be said in their favor: you will find no more devoted husbands on earth. The very fact that any day may bring an order which will separate them, and the frequent exposure to danger, serve to strengthen the tie and to keep alive in the heart of the husband the ardor of the lover."

"I have heard Mrs. Ashbur remark that when they were last out on the recruiting service, her sister often declared that army officers seemed the most lover-like of husbands," said Miss Kate. "My father, however, thinks no officer under the rank of major should be allowed to take a wife. He says their pay is insufficient, and women are greatly in the way on the march. I believe only his fear that I might take it into my head to become a nun in course of time, if left much longer in the convent, induced him to let me join him again in Texas. I acknowledge I encouraged his fears on this point."

"Had you any idea of burying yourself alive in that fashion?" asked he, with a look of horror.

"Not the remotest. I have not the shadow of a vocation for the religious life. My unspiritual nature finds it sufficiently hard to make the little sacrifices demanded of us in a life in the world. I should shrink from the thousand and one austerities and mortifications practised by the good nuns. Even their plain food would be a trial to me, for I am

fond of nice dishes. I can make them, too, for I learned that art of Sister Seraphine, though Tom does laugh at some of my failures. Then, too, a morning nap, just for a last dream, is one of the rewards of a good conscience, and those poor sisters go pattering around the house in the dark, like so many owls, at five o'clock on a freezing winter morning."

"*O-o-o-o! that* is enough of itself to keep any sane girl out of a nunnery," said Hawthorn, with a sympathetic shiver, remembering with what reluctance on many a cold morning he had been torn from his couch at the unwelcome sound of the *reveille.*

"Another of my fancies," continued Miss Kate, "is to read interesting novels until a late hour at night, while in the convent we retire about the time the chickens go to roost. It is true that whenever my thoughts desire to dwell on the most peaceful scene below the skies, I find myself wandering in spirit from room to room and through the winding passages, taking a few steps up here and a few down there at unexpected places in the dear irregular, odd old convent of the Sacred Heart in St. Louis. Every bush and flower in the yard has a sweet and separate association. I love the very iron gate through which we caught glimpses of the good things in the French market, and over the threshold of which we so seldom passed."

"Miss Kate," abruptly asked Hawthorn, "if your father's determination never to bestow the hand of his daughter on a poor army officer dependent on

his pay could possibly be overcome, could *you* emulate the self-sacrifice of such women as your friend, Mrs. Ashbur, and consent to share a soldier's hard lot?"

"Your description of the hardships of such a life is enough to deter me," said the young lady, laughing and blushing. "But there is no telling what I might be tempted to do if Dr. McBriar perseveres in his attentions, and writes many more verses addressed to me under the title of 'The lassie wi' the lint-white locks.' When he once put on that enchanting smile of his, and demanded (as I turned all his pretty speeches into ridicule), '*What* shall I say to make you understand my love and my misery?' I suggested that he *might* say, 'Pity the sorrows of a poor old man, whose trembling limbs have brought him to your door.'"

"I did not believe you could be so hard-hearted," said Hawthorn, who could not help having a fellow-feeling for the doctor, "though his presumption—at his age—is sufficiently ridiculous."

"If I believed the man in earnest, I should not laugh at him, nor should I betray such delicate secrets. But who could treat seriously his exaggerated and *al-fresco* style of courtship? Everything is said in a half-jesting tone, and all of his pretty speeches are made in the face of the world. Tom Heron was present when he called on me to instruct him what to say, and the doctor himself laughed heartily, and said perhaps the lines *would* be appropriate. Father asked him once, in my presence, what he meant by

talking such nonsense to a child; to which the doctor replied that he only wished to keep his hand in until some handsome widow of suitable age and fortune should present herself."

"I am anxious to know, Miss Kate, in what mood you receive Mr. Volney's sweet speeches. You can scarcely feign a doubt of his sincerity. Which reminds me: when we came in that day from our unlucky fishing I fancied he looked daggers at me as we rode by. And afterwards, seeming to repent him of his chilly salutation, he inquired after my wounded arm and made a set speech, thanking me for having rescued you, expressing such gratitude that one would have supposed you his promised bride."

The rosy hue that stained Kate Comerford's delicate complexion both surprised and pained Hawthorn. Had he stumbled upon or near the truth?

Kate could scarcely herself understand why this allusion to one for whom she only cherished the mildest friendship should cause the blood to rush to her cheek and her heart to beat so uncomfortably. Now, first of all, she dreaded any suspicion entering Hawthorn's mind of her silly, girlish fancy for Paul Volney, especially of the terribly imprudent proof she had given of her infatuation on the ever-memorable night of the *baile.* Shame for that girlish escapade had often dyed her cheeks with hot blushes when memory recalled the past, even while in the safe retreat of her convent home.

For the first time the thought now struck her that the engagement had never been formally dissolved.

Certainly Paul had not seemed to take the frustration of his plans greatly to heart at the time, and she had considered the whole thing at an end forever. "Did Volney still hold himself in honor bound?" was the next thought which obtruded itself. In this connection a sentiment advanced by Hawthorn some days previous now recurred with painful distinctness to her mind and troubled her heart.

Hawthorn had dwelt with marked emphasis on the binding force of marriage engagements, led to such expression by a dissertation on flirting carried on principally between McBriar and Jack Waters. Waters had remarked during the discussion "that it would be well if *some people*" (here he stared at Miss Kate, who in her innocence paid no heed) "viewed marriage itself in as serious a light as Mr. Hawthorn did a simple engagement."

Watching the varying expression of the young girl's features, Hawthorn, as a matter of course, gave to these tokens of embarrassment the interpretation least favorable to his own hopes, and, after the manner of all self-tormenting lovers, descended at once from the green and sunny heights of Hope to the very bottom of the abyss of Despair.

Seizing his hat, he bade an abrupt good-night, leaving Miss Kate so miserable that only a fit of tears could do justice to her outraged feelings.

"Whatever becomes of Lieutenant Hawthorn (and I hope he may soon meet with a girl who has never broken an engagement, and make her Mrs. Hawthorn), this hateful engagement, if one still exists,

must and shall be cancelled, at whatever cost of blushes to myself in having to allude to the past," was Kate's resolve.

Volney and Heron returned one Sunday morning from their scout, having, as anticipated, seen nothing of the Indians, though they had faithfully scoured the prairies for many miles with the assistance of the best Indian guide in Texas; all that had been accomplished being the initiation of the men into the mysteries of horsemanship, Tom vowing that he would now match them against centaurs, in a short race, in the way of sticking on. Nothing short of an earthquake would unseat them.

After reporting their proceedings and want of success to the commanding officer, Volney, hearing that the ladies were gone to what the soldiers proudly called *the chapel*, bent his steps thither.

Not far from the walls of the hospital, and directly east of that unfinished building, stood a small, octagonal, log edifice on a pretty, green knoll. It had been built as a labor of love by the soldiers, under the direction of Lieutenants Hawthorn and Waters, to be used as a Sunday-school, and for such religious services as could be conducted without a priest. Here the rosary was recited and the Litany sung.

The inner walls of this *petite* chapel were ornamented with a fresco of shells and pebbles, the larger shells being arranged in form of crosses, stars, crowns, etc., all imbedded in the cement in a truly ingenious manner.

There was even an altar, because it was hoped that some time a priest from San Antonio might visit Fort Fairfax. This small altar was formed of interlaced boughs of oak, preserving their natural form, only the bark being removed; the top was a slab of red cedar, the edges carved in sheaves of wheat and grape-vines.

A passion-flower vine (artificial of course) had been woven in and out among the twisted oak boughs, its very singular rich purple flowers and dark-green leaves contrasting well with the hue of the wood.

A large crucifix of ivory and ebony stood in the centre of the altar, and on either side one silver and one handsomely carved wooden candlestick. The silver ones belonged to Mrs. Silvers, and the other two had been formed by the skilful hand of a Swiss wood-carver, whom some strange chance had led to enlist in the United States army. The *amputated* bed-posts of Mrs. Ashbur had furnished material.

On Sundays and other holidays candles were lighted, and wild-flowers, hitherto wasting their sweetness on the desert air and trodden under foot of savages, were here put to their sweetest use, and enjoyed the privilege of sending up their fragrance as incense in union with the prayers of the children.

The floor of this unique chapel, composed of cement, was paved all around the altar with the coral-like seed of the *lignum vitæ*.

In the spring the outer walls, now showing the bark of the logs, were to be mantled by ivy, cypress, and other vines.

The altar had on it, besides the crucifix and the candlesticks, a few large and exquisitely beautiful sea-shells, generously donated by Mrs. Duval, whose brother, a naval officer, had sent home a rare collection.

A small set of *stations of the cross*, bound in blue ribbon for lack of frames, were tacked at intervals around the walls. Hawthorn, who was no contemptible artist, was engaged in the daring undertaking of painting, after a small model in Mrs. Silvers's prayer-book, *The Adoration of the Shepherds.* This was to be completed before Christmas, provided the artist did not a second time introduce so striking a likeness of a certain blue-eyed Catherine—by no means a saint—as to be compelled once more to undo his work.

In order to overcome this temptation, and to give vent to his feelings, he began another picture, in secret, in which the lady of his heart was depicted in the character of the Peri at the gate of Eden presenting as her passport the precious tear of the repentant sinner. The repentant sinner in the picture bore a strong likeness in form and feature to the handsome artist. What *rôle* will a man not assume to be brought near to his heart's delight?

The last hymn was being sung as Volney reached the open chapel door:

"Come up hither, pause nor falter,
Thou shalt see a wondrous sight:
By the golden incense altar
Stands an angel clad in white."

Listening, he distinguished the superb voice of Mrs. Duval, the sweet clear notes of Kate Comerford, and the rich tenor of that confounded Hawthorn! In the chorus the shrill voices of the children went up, and O'Brien and Nora, with their sweet Irish brogue, did not mar the melody, as they sang:

"Priest of Heaven—Angelus—
May ye ever pray for us!"

Paul Volney, as he gazed on the rapt face of one of the worshippers, with a pale blue veil like a cloud shading her golden hair, was thinking that an angel could scarcely be fairer. But when his gaze turned upon the dark-brown wavy hair and deep blue eyes of Hawthorn, it did not enter his mind to liken that handsome—provokingly handsome—head to saint or angel. He rather felt this dangerous rival to be the serpent of his paradise.

The love which was enkindled on the Rio Grande, but which had since suffered an eclipse in his heart, if truth be told, now burst forth in something of its original force.

As they came out of the chapel, the bright blushes with which this blue-veiled angel welcomed him back, and congratulated him on leaving none of his chestnut locks as trophies for the Comanches, reassured in a measure his doubting heart. But the persistent presence of Hawthorn on her right, preventing any approach to a sentimental *tête-à-tête* as they slowly walked homeward, served to irritate Paul quite as much with the young lady as against his brother-in-

arms. For surely it was her fault that any man should presume to hang about her in this fashion without a suspicion of being *de trop*.

In the evening Volney called at Colonel Comerford's canvas residence, hoping to secure the bewitching Kate as companion in a moonlight stroll along the green banks of the brook.

There sat Dr. McBriar, tilted back in his chair, with one hand thrust in his pocket, the other engaged in threading his iron-gray locks,—a favorite attitude,—while he was making extravagant, half-mocking love-speeches to the laughing Kate, who seemed to have just left off singing, as she still held the guitar. Hawthorn, flute in hand, looking enough like an Apollo to make Paul feel savage, stood by her side.

"Was ever mortal so vexed by impertinent interlopers!" thought Volney.

"If music be the food of love" (the doctor was quoting), "play on. Give me excess of it——"

"Better let the poor thing die in peace at last," said Miss Kate. "I began to fear your Cupid had as many lives as a cat; if it be possible to starve it to death, and so give you peace in your declining years, I am willing to renounce music."

Whereupon the good surgeon began:

"'They sin who tell us love can die.
With life all other passions fly—
All others are but vanity.
In heaven ambition cannot dwell.'

See to it, Volney; if you fail to secure your gen-

eral's stars *here* the mishap will never be corrected *there*, and you will be 'the rare and radiant youth whom the angels call' plain Paul Volney, with niver a handle.

"'Nor avarice in the vaults of hell.'

So, colonel, cease to grieve over the fifty dollars of which Yellow Wolf beguiled you. Where was I?—

"'But love is indestructible.
Its holy flame forever burneth;
From heaven it came, to heaven returneth!'"

"Doctor, those gray locks ought to warn you that your time for playing Romeo is over," remarked the colonel. "Esculapius should hold fast to his lancets and leave Cupid's arrows to the boys."

"*I* don't want to play Romeo. Miss Kate and I have no fancy for high tragedy, daggers, and poison. I dinna care a pinch o' snuff for na' sic saft-headed fooleries," retorted McBriar, who at odd times affected the Scotch dialect. "It's Petruchio I'd fain be to this merry Kate.

"Trust not to fickle youth, young lady," continued the irrepressible surgeon. "And take ye notice that it is the doctor who is always the most taking hero in the novel. There is the good Bear in Miss Bremer's 'Home,' Dick May in 'Daisy Chain,' Dr. Hartwell in 'Beulah.'"

"Don't forget Sangrado," put in Hawthorn.

"As I was saying, put not your trust in fickle

youth, my lass, but be as wise as 'Roy's Wife of Aldavalloch,' who has 'ta'en the carl and left her Jamie.'"

> "But Roy's age is three times mine:
> Perhaps his days will not be mony;
> And when the chiel is dead and gane,
> She'll maybe rue, and tak' her Jamie."

Thus sang Volney, determined to get in a word edgewise.

"You shall be welcome to my relict," laughed Dr. McBriar. "But it is ill waiting for dead men's shoon. Why did you not remain in San Antonio, Volney? I have heard that our Paul found there his Virginia—hey?"

The modern Paul did not condescend to notice the rude doctor's last observation; but he managed to say to Miss Comerford, while the others were speaking to Mrs. Ashbur, who had just come in with Clay and Winny,—

"Do you think, under the circumstances, such conversation very edifying? *I* do not relish it."

"Oh," returned the unconscious maiden, lightly, "there is no manner of use in trying to curb the doctor's tongue. If the 'old gentleman'" (the surgeon was not over forty-five) "enjoys this attempt at rejuvenation, I suppose we young people should indulge him."

"And is the same rule to apply to Lieutenant Hawthorn?" was the quick response.

"Well, Mr. Hawthorn is not quite a Methuselah,

nor is he given to making love-speeches," said Miss Kate, with a rosy blush.

"Perhaps not,—in public. But I have more than once had the pain of hearing your name coupled with his. Surely, after what has passed between us, something is due to me, even—— You should not quite——" he stammered on. "I did not think to find you coquetting,—acting the *rôle* of the young lady——"

"Pray, then," cried the astonished girl, "would you have me play the old lady?"

"This levity——" began Volney, sternly, when he was interrupted.

"Oh, Cousin Kate," cried Clay, pulling at her sleeve (sent on this errand by his watchful mother), "do look at my book. Alcy Duval says I don't know enough of military tictacs to command a company, so I am studying up. How do you think Gus Duval behaved when we were having a grand battle yesterday? Alcy was William the Conqueror, and I was Napoleon Bonaparte, and Gus, he was one of Alexander's captains. And when the firing began (we let off five packs of powder-crackers), why, Gus, he got behind his company instead of leading them. And Alcy—William the Conqueror, I mean—shouted out to him to *lead* his men, and not *drive* them like sheep. Gussy, he wouldn't, and just shouted back, 'it wasn't polite to come between company and the fire.'"

"And pray," said his mother (evidently desirous that Miss Comerford's attention should be distracted

from Mr. Volney's earnest speeches), "where was that notable battle fought? Adown the corridors of ages? Certainly, William was the fastest general on record if he managed to cross the centuries and get down in time to meet Napoleon."

"Please, Mr. Paul, tell me all about your fight with the Comanches," continued the aggravating child. "Cousin Tom says you ate all you killed, but I don't believe him."

"Clay," called out Tom Heron, who had followed his aunt into the room, "this much you *may* believe: when the enemy *loomed* in the distance we, very naturally, *wheeled* and came *spinning* home. There! if Paul can *weave* a better story than that, the Fates may cut my thread."

"Foiled again in getting any satisfaction," sighed Volney, as he made his way to his quarters.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE next week Mrs. Silvers gave a party, and charades were introduced, partly in memory of the pleasant evenings enjoyed during the sojourn of the Twelfth at Knocktin Barracks. Mr. Tom Heron said that he had invented a rebus all by himself, which the others should have the pleasure of guessing.

First he placed his cousin Kate's parrot on its perch, and set the perch in the middle of the floor. By her side, to the right, stood Clay Ashbur, dressed as an Indian and holding the deuce of spades in his hand, while on the table before him lay a pack of cards with spades turned up for trumps. Next to the cards stood Mrs. Silvers's hand-bell and a five-dollar note. Last of all, Tom, after a visit to the kitchen, returned with a fine venison ham, which the Indian guide had that day presented to Major Silvers, and placed it also on the table. To the ham a card was attached, marked "Price, fifty dollars."

These preliminaries arranged, the company were informed that they had before them a celebrated work of art.

"Oh, that is easy enough," cried Dr. McBriar. "The *Indian* is a *bird* of ill-omen, who will *play the deuce* with the *dear* — palefaces understood, I presume."

The doctor, as usual, had blundered; but Lieutenant Boswell read the riddle, which was pronounced very simple indeed as soon as the word was spoken: *Apol-lo-bell-V-dere!*

"I almost had it. I said *dear*, you know," insisted Dr. McBriar.

"And played the deuce with the rest of it," laughed Major Silvers.

"Now guess this," said the doctor: "Why do men run to the bells when the town is on fire? Give it up? Because they are in *suspension* and ought to be *tolled*."

Mr. Hawthorn proposed this: "Why was Edgar A. Poe supposed to draw his inspiration from tea?"

"Because it is more charitable than to fancy him inspired by something stronger," was the solution offered by Captain Ashbur.

"George never could guess a riddle," said his wife. "Is it not because a little black *t* would make Edgar A. *Poet?*"

"Listen! Here is one on which I have fairly exhausted myself," said Mr. Volney: "When a little nigger was cracked over the head by his teacher his exclamation was the title of one of Tennyson's poems. Which?"

Every one gave it up. "Enoch Arden (he knock hard den)."

"Volney, does your head ache?" said Waters. "I fear we shall lose you,—too bright to last."

This was Captain Francisco's contribution: "When is a man justified in putting on airs? Answer: When

his wife blows him up because he can't raise the wind."

"This is the best I can do," said Jack Waters, when called on in turn: "If I should marry, why would my wife be sure to rule me?"

"Because you would be the weaker vessel, I suppose," said Mrs. Silvers.

"No; because I'd be only *quarter master?*"

"Let the wife alone, Mr. Waters, until you are something more than that. Don't insult a lady by offering her any lower rank than that of a major's wife," said Colonel Comerford. "Why should Mrs. Silvers now serve up a whale for our refreshment? Because the brains of this company must now be completely exhausted."

"Now, colonel, don't be sarcastic. Here is the last and best," said Dr. McBriar: "My *first* tries my *second*, and my *second*, in executing my *first*, creates my *whole*. I offer a prize to the one who solves that."

No one could. Mrs. Ashbur said she would, if she had to stay awake all night to do it. Never yet had she found a puzzle too hard for her.

Miss Kate also was a good guesser, and entered the lists. We may as well state here that, after letting the whole garrison puzzle their heads over it for one whole week, the propounder of that riddle coolly acknowledged he had never been able to find an answer. The thing was not original with him; he had come across it in some newspaper years ago, and had often wasted an hour in trying to solve it.

The main feature of this evening's entertainment was to be a chant or recitation called "Liberty's Requiem," accompanied by tableaux. Hawthorn had been at the trouble of painting a scene for it, and that the effect might not be spoiled by a crowded stage, Mrs. Silvers had induced her husband to pitch an extra hospital tent.

To this tent the company now adjourned. The portion of the assembly representing the audience—not a large one—being at last seated, the curtain rose. The scene presented a view of a calm, starry night and a fallen evergreen-tree, looking as if splintered by lightning, on the broken bough of which perched an eagle with folded wings and drooping head.

In front of this scene, stretched on a rustic bier, with the American flag as a pall, lay the beautiful Genius of Liberty, pallid yet lovely, the bright blue eyes closed, the long golden hair sweeping the ground, one fair arm thrown above the head, the other hanging over the side of the bier. A wreath of bay-leaves had half fallen from the brow, and on the ground lay the cap and shield of the goddess, and near them a broken sword. Drops of blood stained crimson the white of the banner used as a pall.

Mournful music is heard, also the tolling of bells and the beating of muffled drums in the distance. In a solemn chant these words fall on the ear:

"Weep, weep for her, Columbia!
Ye lakes and rivers mourn;

Let mountains bow their hoary heads;
We sing a glory gone,
Since Liberty is dead."

In the beginning the singers are not in view. The first part of each stanza that follows is chanted by two voices, the chorus by many.

I.

"Dark night cometh on, and the wild waves moan,
And the stars their stern vigil are keeping,
And the dews fall heavy and cold on her bier,
For nature, all nature, is weeping.
A thousand muffled drums are beating,
A million hearts the sound repeating;
While tolling of bells
To the nation tells
That Liberty is dead."

During the chanting of the second stanza there enters a group of women and children, in white robes, but wearing wreaths of cypress and streamers of black crape. In passing they throw flowers on the bier.

The requiem goes on:

II.

"'How could you let her die?' Columbia's daughters sigh,
As they cover the dead with pale flowers;
'Loved ones ere this we've lost,—on many a field they lie,—
But ne'er till now such grief, such grief was ours.
Strew we the fragrant flowers about her.
Ah, what are we to do without her?
God help the land,
On whose doomed strand
Fair Liberty was slain!'

III.

"Full of remorse and woe, the young men mutter low:
'Thou wast slain, oh, slain while we were dreaming.
Can aught efface the stain? Ah, no; ah, no!
Vengeance!' they cry, while swords on high are gleaming.
'We vow, though *we* may ne'er regain thee,
Woe to the dastards who have slain thee!
Ah, dread the doom
Of those by whom
Our Liberty was slain.'"

During the chanting of these words the women pass out, and their place is taken by young men, who, at the cry of *Vengeance!* draw and clash their swords.

The young men disappear, and the bier is surrounded by old, gray-headed men, who take up the mournful procession as the plaintive strain continues:

IV.

"The old gray-headed men weep and gaze again:
'Our fathers bought thee with a ransom gory.
Why are *we* left when thou, when thou art slain,
Thus to outlive our country's glory?
Thrice happy he whose hand is free
Of thy pure blood, lost Liberty.
Now let us die,'
The old men cry,
'*Since Liberty is dead.*'

V.

"Yea, weep for her, Columbia!
Let solemn anthems ring.
The nations bow their mournful heads,
While men and maidens sing

This requiem true
As tolls the bell.
And thus we bid adieu—
Farewell, farewell!"

As the curtain fell Colonel Comerford turned to Major Silvers and remarked, "May this requiem not be prophetic of disaster to our country!"

"Those lines have taken an uncomfortable hold on my imagination," said the latter, standing up and shaking himself, as if to get rid of the impression left by the requiem.

"Miss Kate," said Aunt Phebe, behind the scenes, "I feel like everything and everybody is done gone dead, and there ain't nothing left worth living for," thus familiarly addressing the Genius of Liberty, who now appeared "alive, and alive like to be."

"Thank you, Aunt Phebe," replied Liberty; "that is just the impression we wished to create. I almost shed tears over my own fate during that sad chant."

"And I," said Mr. Volney, in a low tone, addressing Miss Comerford, "was tempted to give one of my fellow-mourners something to weep for by running him through with my sword as we passed the bier. Confound him! one might fancy from the way he gazed at you that Liberty was his lost bride."

"Mr. Volney, I cannot see why my friends may not be allowed to mourn my loss without incurring your displeasure," said Kate, indignantly. "Really, one would fancy that, instead of lying peacefully on her bier, Liberty was a captive led about in chains by a valiant lieutenant of the United States army."

"Perhaps, madam, you find the bonds, which I had hoped would prove too silken to gall, heavy as the chains of a slave," retorted the gentleman, with both color and temper rising.

"The bonds! the chains!" exclaimed the astonished young lady. "Surely, you do not seriously think—— Certainly an engagement so lightly, so rashly formed, can easily be dissolved. I thought the—the turn things took on the night of the *baile* had made an end of all. If any formality is yet necessary to undo that folly, let it be gone through with at once. I absolve you from your—promises, and claim my own freedom."

Had the heavens fallen Paul Volney's face could not have expressed greater consternation.

"*Impossible!*" he exclaimed. "I deeply regret my utter inability to release you. I cannot express my chagrin that you should desire it."

"Come, Volney," said the voice of young Heron; "supper is waiting, or, I should say, disappearing. Hello! what are you and Madame Liberty-come-to-life quarrelling over? Does she lay her death at your door?"

"Only her chains," replied Volney, bitterly.

"Nonsense! Madame Freedom was only 'possuming to-night. For all that is come and gone, she has a good long career before her as queen of Uncle Sam's domain, and the only chain she knows is the one which unites the States. May it never snap! Come, let us go and drink that toast."

About this time an incident occurred which sent a thrill of excitement throughout the garrison. The tidings flew in all directions. Gustavus and Alcibiades Duval tumbled into their mother's room, overturning their brother Antonio in their headlong race to be first with the news.

"Oh, mother, Mr. Boswell has been impudent to Sargeant O'Brien, and struck him in the face, and they are going to fight a *juel!*" cried Gustavus.

"He means O'Brien has been dis-subordinate and knocked Mr. Boswell into the middle of last week, and is to be court-martialed and hung up by the thumbs, according to army regulations made and provided," was the lucid explanation of his elder brother.

We leave Mrs. Duval to unravel and separate fact from fiction, while we listen to what is passing in the other tents on this same day.

Miss Comerford, with her plump arms bared to the dimpled elbows, a large check apron tied about her neck, was deep in the mysteries of calf's-foot jelly. The whole kitchen was permeated with the delightful fragrance of spices, lemons, and wine.

"A half-glass more of that madeira and just two more cloves, Martha, will make this compound *incombustible*, as Aunt Phebe says," remarked Kate, taking a spoonful from the steaming kettle and tasting.

"Miss Kate, darlint," cried Nora Ryan, rushing in without ceremony, and casting herself on her knees at the young lady's feet, still holding fast in

her arms her charge, Mrs. Duval's precious baby, —"oh, if you've got the heart of a woman in your breast, save him! I implore you, save him!"

"Why, what in the world is the matter with the child? Get up, Nora, and give me the baby. From what am I to save him?" and Kate gazed in bewilderment at the rosy, laughing boy.

"Not *him*, Miss Kate. *O'Brien!*" gasped Nora.

"Come with me into my room, Nora," said Miss Comerford, taking off her apron. "One more squeeze of that lemon, Martha. Watch the kettle; don't let it boil over. When it comes to a boil count twenty, and then take it off. And whatever you do, don't *stir* it. Now, Nora."

Having reached Miss Kate's room, Nora thus began:

"I was trying my fortune, Miss Kate, me and Mrs. Brown's Bridget, it being All Hallow-e'en. In the ould counthry we pull up a cabbage-stalk from the garden, but for lack of gardens or cabbages in this forsaken place, we had stuck in the ground, in the prairie down by, a half-dozen tent-pins. Some we had marked with charcoal to signify riches, and, more be token, we had writ on them certain names; and as we walked backward, with niver a word nor a smile (which would break the charm, you know), I was hoping the one marked *old maid* would not fall to my lot; and niver a worse thing were we thinkin', nor dreamt of a man being nigh. Each of us had a bunch of green ribbon in our hair, and we repeated:

"'On Hallow-e'en we wear the green:
O Mother Earth, our fate declare!'

All of a sudden Bridget turned and gave a screech, and broke for home as fast as her two legs would carry her. Just thin I was stooping backwards to pull up me cabbage-stalk,—leastways what stood for it,—when I found myself, all unbeknownst, in the arms of a man! I thought I had fallen into the hands of savages; so I struck out with both hands and feet with all my might, at the same time yelling for—I am not sure *who* I called on; St. Michael, most likely, for he sint his namesake to me aid,—but not before that unmannerly brute had snatched a kiss."

"Gracious, Nora!" interposed Kate; "you ought to be thankful it was not your scalp he snatched."

"That villain o' the worreld was no Indian, Miss Kate," cried Nora, blushing, "but one as calls himself a gintleman—save the mark!—Leftenant Boswell by name.

"Now, I'd ask any lady to say what could O'Brien do when he found me struggling in the arms of an assassin but up with his fist and fell him to the ground?

"Misfortunately, he called Boswell by name, adding some not over-polite titles which belong to him by rights, but was overlooked in the christening of him. So when O'Brien is tried for it, he can't pretind to have took him for an Indian.

"Mr. Boswell is furious, and vows O'Brien shall be broke of his rank, and also thrashed within an inch of his life. The lies that man will tell to get

himself out of the scrape and ruin O'Brien is unbelievable."

"But what am I to do, Nora? I see, indeed, how an officer's word may be made to outweigh the unsupported testimony of a soldier, and I am afraid you will not be able to help him much, as your testimony may be considered interested. You two might be accused of collusion."

"That wretch has caused me confusion enough, confound him!"

"Confusion worse confounded," quoted Tom Heron, poking his head in at the half-open door.

"Come in, Mr. Heron," said Nora, "and help me to beg Miss Kate, in the name o' the blissed Virgin, to go on her bare knees to the colonel and besach him to show mercy to a poor lad and justice to a bad man."

"I don't think that style of penance would have much effect on the feelings of our chief," said Tom, walking in and taking possession of a chair and of the baby, with whom he was a great favorite. Besides, young ladies have no knees, only ankles tied to their petticoats. However, Nora, we shall do everything to clear O'Brien if possible. Boswell is not popular in the regiment, and *I* don't put faith in all he says, but the ugly fact remains of a soldier striking an officer."

Now let us listen to what is being said on the subject in another tent.

"George," said Mrs. Ashbur, "what is this story of a soldier raising his hand to an officer?"

"The hand was not only raised, but fell like a sledge-hammer, and the officer, to his sorrow, was underneath," replied Captain Ashbur. "This is Boswell's version: In going the rounds as officer of the guard he discovered that O'Brien had deserted his post. Whether he had been beguiled from the post of duty by the ring of his lady-love brought him by a dwarf, as in the case of Sir Kenneth in the 'Talisman,' or had only stepped into a tent to wet his whistle, Boswell does not pretend to say. What he does say is, that when found and sharply reprimanded by himself, O'Brien had insolently answered that he cared little for Boswell's displeasure, as he had shown himself the better soldier of the two on the day of the fishing; and the soldier put the climax to his impudence by asserting that the colonel had proposed that they should change places.

"Now if O'Brien really said this, its coming so near the truth was enough to enrage a milder-tempered man than Boswell. So the very fact that he declares he did not strike O'Brien on such provocation makes me doubt the whole story.

"He goes on to say that, cursing the man for a vain idiot, he ordered him to the guard-house, and, turning to walk on, the next moment he was felled to the ground by a blow on the back of his head. There is certainly an ugly contusion there,—worse than the bump on the forehead,—but that might have come from a fall on a tent-pin, several of which were found sticking in the ground.

"When he came to his senses he says he heard a

woman's voice in confab with O'Brien, and he caught some words about 'helping Mick out of the mess by a pious fib.'"

"What will be the end of it?" inquired Mrs. Ashbur, anxiously.

"I fear it will go hard with O'Brien. There is no doubt of the striking,—he does not deny that,—and it might have proved fatal. The least punishment will be to break him of his rank,—no light loss to a sergeant with marriage in his eye. What further will be done I can't say."

Kate's appeal to her father was answered by a stern rebuke and a recommendation not to meddle with what in no way concerned her, and a grumbling complaint that the women among them had spoiled O'Brien and were ready to believe any villainy of Boswell because he had eyes for no one but pretty Mrs. Brown.

Boswell told a plausible tale, which was still further substantiated by a soldier coming forward and testifying to having seen from a distance Boswell's overthrow at the hands of O'Brien, and he was positive there was no third person, no woman, present at that time. This soldier was a discarded suitor of Nora, however, and not noted for his veracity.

The wound was a severe one, and Boswell was still suffering from it when the verdict was given which reduced Sergeant O'Brien to the ranks.

It was felt very desirable to substantiate beyond doubt the entire truthfulness of the officer's statement, and every effort was made to induce O'Brien

to admit that he and Nora, in their account of the fracas, had borne false witness against Boswell. But the man stoutly declared he would be flayed alive before he would give the lie to his own words, while Nora vowed by all the saints she had spoken the naked thruth.

Thus matters stood for a few days, when the garrison was treated to another sensation. The unhappy O'Brien had deserted! At least he was nowhere to be found, and it was supposed that he had madly risked starvation on the plains or captivity among the Indians in his rash effort to reach the settlements, rather than remain and face his disgrace. And a party was at once dispatched to capture the deserter.

Poor Nora was inconsolable. She indignantly refused to believe her Mick had turned deserter, and offered all manner of wild theories to account for his non-appearance.

"Perhaps the Indians had 'captivated' him, and taken him off; or, more likely, Pat Hays" (the soldier whose testimony had borne hard on O'Brien) "had murthered him and hid the body. She knew he had been afther taunting him with his fall from rank."

All was consternation and confusion. O'Brien's best friends were shaken in their belief of his story against Boswell; for what was too bad to be believed of a *deserter?*

Miss Kate, influenced by the firm faith of Nora, still hoped for some favorable solution to the mystery. Yet what was there for hope to feed on? His

death would be preferable to the certain and terrible punishment of a deserter.

In the constant search kept up far and near a curious thing was brought to light. In a hollow or ravine west of the post, near an old live-oak tree, were found an arrow and a scrap of bead-embroidered buckskin, evidently torn from the leggin of an Indian.

Mrs. Duval had need of all her patience to put up with the vagaries of her nurse. The baby's frock was often put on wrong side out by accident, and left so for *luck*. The flannels were starched as stiff as boards, while the collars and cuffs, which it was Nora's business to "do up," were left as limp as wilted leaves; while the staunchest colors in the muslins—even the national red and blue—were forced to *run* by the deluge of boiling suds intended for the flannels. Soda found its way into the baby's milk instead of sugar, until the child fizzed and foamed like ginger-pop. Miss Cecilia complained that her food was salted with Nora's tears.

At length, when she handed the baby at table in place of hot buckwheat cakes and carefully laid the cakes to rest in the cradle, Captain Duval thought it time to interfere, and insisted that the demented girl should be excused from duty until her mind became more settled.

After six days of suspense the pursuing party returned with the deserter. They had come upon him some eighty miles northwest of Fort Fairfax. O'Brien expressed himself glad to be found, and told a highly

sensational and wholly improbable tale about being taken captive by the Indians.

"Tom," said Mrs. Ashbur, who was watching that young gentleman as he stirred his third cup of coffee, —Heron had been one of O'Brien's captors, and this was his first leisurely and hot meal within six days, —"how does he account for his disappearance?"

"Another lump of sugar, if you please, Cousin Kate" (for of course Kate had hurried over to hear the news from Tom's own mouth); "'leave but a kiss within the cup and I'll not ask for wine,' and I'll hand over the kiss to Hawthorn or Volney, just as you say.

"Aunt Aggy, O'Brien is a second Munchausen. He wishes us to believe first that on the memorable night of his taking off, provoked beyond endurance by the jibes and sneers of his rival, he challenged him to a fight, and he and Pat Hays had stolen down to the hollow in which stands the big oak-tree to settle matters by a duel, without the usual impedi-ments of firearms or seconds.

"After well pounding each other with such arms as natured had bestowed for that purpose,—O'Brien claims the victory,—both men started to return to their quarters; but of course they were not walking amicably arm in arm, and Pat, he says, may have reached home; but he, 'onlucky boy that he is,' heard an arrow whiz by, and found himself seized from behind and gagged, lifted to a horse, and bodily carried off! It was not the devil that flew away with him (as well for him that it had been), nor

yet St. Michael taking him off to glory before his time, but neither more nor less than *Yellow Wolf* and a few other wolves of the Comanche breed.

"This veracious soldier further states that when they heard us approaching one of the Indians made a slash at his scalp, but missed the mark, owing partly to the shortness of his hair, which gave no *holt*, but mostly to the fact that his hand, which he had managed to free from its bonds, flew up, natururally, and held 'the place where the wool ought to grow.' In proof, he showed his still bleeding fingers."

"*I* believe every word," said Kate, with emphasis.

"Well, my dear, if your hope and charity are as active as your faith, you are almost an angel."

"At any rate, Tom," remarked his aunt, "the arrow and scrap of buckskin found under that very oak-tree would thus be accounted for."

"A very pretty bit of circumstantial evidence," replied Mr. Heron; "but what is to hinder them being left there a month ago, when the Comanches honored us with a friendly visit to beg a little sugar for their mint-juleps? But I must tear myself away, ladies, as every one is waiting to interview me. Thanks; no more at present" (as Miss Kate offered to refill his empty cup). "That delicious coffee has done my very soul good. By-bye." And Tom pushed back his chair, seized his hat, made a low bow, and hurried out.

CHAPTER IX.

"MISS KATE," said Nora Ryan (who had persuaded the young lady to go with her to the chapel to pray for her lover's deliverance), as they sat together on the door-sill of the little building after their devotions, Nora's votive-candle burning mildly on the altar,—"Miss Kate, you know how they serve deserters? though *he* niver bemeaned himself to that depth o' depravity. Their heads are shaved on one side; they are lashed like slaves, branded on the back with the letter *D;* and, as if that was not shame enough to kill a dog, much less a man, they are drummed out of the garrison to the tune of the rogue's march. I am told there is niver a hope for O'Brien. Is there any call for an innocent man to endure all this disgrace when a drop of poison or the stroke of a dagger would save him?"

"Nora, poor child, grief has made you wild," said Miss Comerford, pressing the girl's hands in her own, while the tears streamed from her lovely eyes. "Would you have the man you love ruin his immortal soul that he may escape from an unjust, most unjust, punishment? Remember who bore stripes and scorn for our sake."

"But I will save him the sin," said Nora, eagerly, her eyes flashing; "he need not even have the sin of consenting to my act. I have the heart to give him

the death-blow with this hand rather than he shall live in disgrace. I shall have time to repint. The rest of me days shall be spent in a convent, praying for his soul and me own."

"No sisterhood would admit you with your blood-stained hands. Would O'Brien, think you, accept such a wicked sacrifice? Nora, dear Nora, pray that you be kept from this awful temptation."

The two girls talked earnestly for full half an hour longer; and a pretty picture it was to see them, framed in by the chapel-door, for Nora was a regular Irish beauty, with rosy cheeks, large blue eyes, and jet-black, wavy hair.

They met again later in the evening, and continued that conversation. Indeed, I will not assert that Nora did not pass that night in Miss Comerford's room, in order to bring the argument to a conclusion, if possible. And thus it ended:

"I will risk it for your sake, Nora," said Miss Kate, having at length arrived at a determination. "We cannot easily make matters worse than they are at present."

"May the saints make your bed in glory, Miss Kate! May its sheets be of rose-leaves and the blankets of silk!"

When Kate next saw her cousin she said, smiling sweetly, "Cousin Tom, if you will bring me your best coat I will darn that snag in the sleeve. I can mend more neatly than the tailor. And you may as well bring your cloak at the same time: I noticed the lining was badly ripped."

"I will, thanks. But what makes you so very kind, all of a sudden? Are you doing this for a penance?"

Kate laughed and blushed, but answered not.

"Oh, well, Kate, I am willing you should make me a stepping-stone on your road to heaven."

Mrs. Ashbur and Kate also held a prolonged interview, in which the elder lady for a long while withstood the younger, positively refusing to aid or abet in some scheme the latter was urging.

"Impracticable! dangerous! imprudent! impossible!" were words which struck in vain against Kate Comerford's headstrong determination, until, finally, if this debate had aught to do with religion, St. Catherine overcame St. Agnes.

A hat, sword, and some other articles of Captain Ashbur's wardrobe were smuggled out of the house without leave asked of the rightful owner.

Uncle Hector, Colonel Comerford's body-sergeant, was also deprived of a suit of clothes, yet not without his full permission and full understanding of the use to be made of his garments.

The eve of O'Brien's ignominious punishment was at hand. A fierce Texas "norther" was gathering force and furiously flapping the tent-flies. There was no moon, and the scudding clouds intercepted much of the starlight.

The guard-house was a stout log building, which certainly had never before, in its short existence, held within its four rough walls a man so miserable as the one who now walked its floor bemoaning his cruel

fate, with every now and then a prayer for aid trembling on his pale lips.

The sentinel, pacing to and fro in front of the door, was greatly surprised at the vision of Miss Nora Ryan, or her ghost, who begged to be permitted speech of the prisoner.

"I hate myself for refusing any bequest of yourn, Miss Nora, but it would be at the risk of my life to grant it without a permit," said the man, politely touching his cap and presenting arms.

"I understand," said the girl, "that O'Brien is that weakened by his throubles that it is feared he will not be able to kape on his blessed feet the morrow, and I have brought him something to strengthen him, poor lad! I have no permit, but this much I have gained by dint o' beggin' and beseechin': the colonel has promised to send an officer down this very night to take O'Brien up to the chapel, to say there his last prayers, for I doubt he lives through it."

"You are hoaxing me, Miss Nora, sure, though I can't see what harm it would do to let the poor devil ease his mind in that way, seeing what is a-coming upon him; but this is quite out of the usual line of my experience in army doings."

Nora paid no attention to this, but handed the sentinel a bottle, which she drew from under her cloak, and said, with her sweetest smile, "Now, couldn't you manage to pass this to him, to cheer his poor soul at such a pinch?"

"A second time I must say No, though it breaks

my heart entirely, I do resure you, miss," said the gallant sentinel.

Nora felt greatly relieved, for she had trembled for fear he should agree to her proposal, and thus defeat her next move.

"Thin just be afther taking a taste yoursilf for your willin'ess to oblige. I know a soldier must obey orders. But take a drop; 'twill do you no bit o' harrum this bitter cold night."

She coquettishly put the flask first to her own red lips, and soon had the delight of seeing it drained by the sentinel.

That spirit must have been somewhat of the strongest, for when, after a few moments spent in pleasant chat with pretty Nora, and she had taken her departure, the sentinel was hailed by an officer, who presented what purported to be an order from the colonel, he found, on striking a light to read the paper, that the letters danced and swam before his eyes in a most unaccountable manner.

"This must be written in Latin," murmured the dazed man, who seemed to be half asleep as he stood.

"Very likely," said the clear voice of Lieutenant Heron. "The colonel knows you read that language. Don't you remember handing him once some Latin verses of your own composition? This is intended as a compliment to your scholarship."

"Cer-tain-ly," said the man, who really knew a little Latin, of which he was rather vain, and now fancied he remembered the verses, though this had been only a bold flight of the imagination on the part of

the officer, who trusted to the effects of Nora's powerful beverage to make good his words.

"However, you see it is a permit to O'Brien to go with me to the chapel; so open the door at once."

In his bewildered state nothing seemed to the sentinel at all out of the way in such an order, whereas, if quite sober, it would have taken more than the assurance of a pretty girl, even backed by a note in Latin, presented by an officer, to convince him of the propriety of yielding up his prisoner.

Even as it was, while he awaited their coming out, a glimmering suspicion stole over what was left of his mind that something was wrong. But the reappearance, after some delay, of the slight form, blonde hair, and blue eyes of Lieutenant Heron, followed by O'Brien, put to flight any lingering misgivings. Nor was the sentinel in a condition to notice that the muffled figure of O'Brien was clad in a shabby citizen's dress, or that the effect of his short confinement had been to change his fair and ruddy complexion to the hue of the ace of spades.

The two, walking at a brisk pace, had not gone far in the direction of the chapel when the officer felt a hand laid on his shoulder and heard the unwelcome voice of Paul Volney.

"Heron, Waters tells me you have much influence with your cousin. Urge her to grant me an interview. I may, any day, be ordered off on another Indian scout. She has no right to avoid me in this way. We must come to an understanding. Thunder and lightning! how dare she encourage Hawthorn's

attentions? Tom, you can't imagine the feelings of a man who sees his own wife made love to before his face."

Here the impetuous speaker caught himself up: "What have I said? Well, you must know it soon or late: we were married over two years ago in Mexico."

"That is false!" were the words which sprang to the lips of the mock officer, but they were checked in time, and amended by a hurried,—

"I will do what I can for you. Pray excuse me now; I must go on. Have an engagement." And Lieutenant Volney found himself alone with his troubled heart.

This double of Tom Heron soon overtook the old negro man, who had politely walked on while the gentlemen were in conference.

"Now comes the rub," said he; "we must pass a sentinel, and Nora's precious bottle has not prepared the way for us here."

"Halt!" cried the sentinel, "and give the countersign," after the usual "Who goes there?" had been answered.

"Hum-hum-hum," was the reply received.

"Speak louder; I don't catch it," said the sentinel.

"You fool! would you have me inform the whole garrison? Hum-um-um," said the officer.

"That may be the word in *Choctaw*, but I must have it in English," insisted the stupid man.

"Can't you see who I am, donkey?" and the

lifted cap showed the blonde locks and handsome features of the soldiers' pet officer, young Heron.

"I see, sir; but I must likewise hear," said the man, touching his cap with his forefinger.

"*Thunder and lightning!*" exclaimed the impatient young gentleman, catching up the words he had so lately heard from Volney's mouth and half drawing his sword, with the intention of rushing past the obtuse (or too acute) guardian of the night.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the soldier, lowering his bayonet. "Why couldn't you say that at first? That is like your fun, now, lieutenant. To be sure, you might have left off the thunder; but then, agin, they mostly goes together."

"How do you account for that escape, O'Brien?" asked the gentleman, with a sigh of relief, as the two disappeared in the darkness from the eyes of the still chuckling sentinel.

"You have happened on a word that resembles or plays upon the true pass-word," said the quick-witted Irishman. "Surely the saints prompted you."

The next sentinel was confidently saluted with the magic words, "*Thunder and lightning!*"

A pause, full of anxiety to the fugitives, was followed by a "Good! good! Who but you, Mr. Heron, would have thought of that?"

On they hurried, and soon encountered Nora, who now took the place of guide, after both she and O'Brien had reverently kissed the hand of his liberator as they parted for the night.

A roundabout road was now taken, which led, not

to the chapel, but to a sort of cave or grotto near the brook, which was to be the temporary hiding-place of O'Brien. Here Nora bade her sable lover a tearful adieu, after handing him a basket of provisions.

Perhaps the happy girl left another little token, else we cannot account for her last words as she fell asleep that night, "That ever I should live to be kissed by a nigger!"

When the second disappearance of O'Brien was noised abroad no one at Fort Fairfax expressed greater surprise than Mrs. Ashbur, Miss Comerford, and the faithful Nora, though the ladies hesitated not to declare their hope that this time his escape would be made good.

Captain Ashbur, on taking up his hat next morning, was heard grumbling about the children being allowed to use it for a footstool as he tried to smooth out the dent in its crown. And when next young Heron had need of his best coat he found the rent in the sleeve neatly mended, indeed, but discovered one shoulder-strap much tarnished by some black substance, which, he was sure, must have got on it while in Kate's possession. He would not again trust his best suit in such careless hands.

The story of the sentinel of the guard-house about a visit from Mr. Heron was only half told, for, on the positive denial by that officer of having been near the place that night, the man, dumfounded, thought best to keep his own counsel about his having let the prisoner out on the strength of a Latin pass. Indeed, his doubts of the reality of the night's vision, and the

growing suspicion that he had been dreaming at his post, were almost confirmed by a conversation with Miss Nora Ryan, which innocent young lady exhibited the utmost indignation at the very suggestion of her having visited a soldier on guard as late as nine o'clock in the evening. He was welcome to ask Mrs. Duval if she was not at that very hour rocking Master Antonio to sleep. It was supposed that the escape had been made through the wide chimney of the guard-house.

The search was thorough and long continued, but fruitless. And if the soldiers saw now and then, not far from the little cave (of which they knew nothing, the opening being well concealed by brush and weeds) the figure of old Uncle Hector in his slouched hat and red bandanna, under which his gray wool was always hidden, busy picking up firewood, what of that? Who could for a moment suspect the presence of O'Brien under that sable mask?

As the search grew warmer, the hermit was smuggled into the very place apparently most dangerous for him, and for that reason least liable to be searched, —the kitchen of the commanding officer of Fort Fairfax!

One day noticing a soldier, Pat Hays, approaching the kitchen, and fearing lest he should recognize his old enemy, Miss Kate called hastily to Uncle Hector, and, putting into his hands a waiter holding a steaming bowl of lemon-punch which she had been preparing for her father's bad cold, she directed him to carry it to the colonel's room.

This was done under the very nose of Pat Hays, the seeming old man brushing him by as he entered the kitchen-door.

Colonel Comerford, sitting half-asleep in his lounging-chair, was rather surprised by the awkward way in which the hot punch was splashed over the waiter, and would have been still more astonished could he have seen how the scalding fluid changed the very color of old Hector's hands.

"Hector," said the colonel, who had been indulging in reminiscences of his youth, at which time he remembered Hector as a man in his prime, "how old are you?"

"'Bout one hundred, master," answered O'Brien, devoutly wishing he were a *thousand*, and dead and decently buried.

"Of course. No veteran of your color ever acknowledged to less than a century or two. I have been recalling incidents of some fifty years past; but I dare say your memory reaches as far back as—the siege of Troy, Hector, son of Priam!"

A low bow and a shuffling exit comprised all the answer deigned by this valiant Greek, who gratefully blessed his stars that he had not been addressed as "Michael, son of Patrick O'Brien!"

"What can have come over old Hector?" said his master, between sips of the delicious compound sent him by his thoughtful daughter. "Any allusion to old times is usually sufficient to open the sluices of his voluminous memory, and bring down on me the pedigree, birth, death, and acts of all the Comerfords

since the flood. He must be ailing. I must have daughter Kate make some of her healing messes for him.

"What a blessing and what a trouble that dear girl is to me,—no mother to watch over her!" Here the father sighed deeply, thinking of the lovely young wife who had faithfully followed his rough fortunes, until she breathed her last on the lonely Canadian frontier.

"With just enough spirit and thoughtlessness to make the doing of silly and romantic things possible, here is my poor Kate with no one but a clumsy old father to look after her."

Ah, little did he imagine the two escapades already indulged in by his blue-eyed beauty.

"Does she care for any of these epauletted, poverty-stricken youths who are forever hovering around her, jealous, I do believe, of every smile or kiss she bestows on her old father? At Knocktin I feared Volney, with his sprightly ways, good looks, and accomplishments,—the young dog sings a splendid song,—and especially his headlong style of love-making, had touched her girlish fancy. But now she evidently shuns his society. And her conduct is either breaking his heart or spoiling his temper, for all of the old spirit and animation seem to have left him.

"There's Hawthorn," continued the colonel in his soliloquy; "fine mind his, and better cultivated than usual with army men. Does the young fellow think I am blind or vain enough to believe his love of

chess and of my own good company brings him so often to my tent? If he had anything independent of his commission, or if I had been able to lay by enough to give them a decent start in life—— There is no telling: Kate might do worse.

"As to the lave of them, I'd take old McBriar for a son-in-law rather than trust one of them."

A train of wagons was on the eve of leaving for San Antonio, and old Hector (the genuine African this time), who had managed to keep himself hidden in odd corners while his shadow walked abroad, came forward with the request to be permitted to go to "Santone" for a few weeks' visit. He longed to go to church once more "'fore he should be called to wade through Jordan to the New Jerusalum."

Of course, the old man was welcome to make this pilgrimage. And so he bade farewell, with promises of offering many prayers for master and Miss Kate.

That morning a small party had assembled on the hill, near the chapel, to see the long train of wagons pass by on their way to that Mecca of Texas soldiers, San Antonio. The road they were watching wound along the green prairie some forty rods distant, and below the station taken by them.

"Oh, I forgot to tell Uncle Hector good-by!" suddenly cried Clay Ashbur, starting on a run down the slope towards the wagons.

"Come back, Clay!" called his mother. "Do stop him, George," appealing to her husband in most unaccountable agitation.

"Why should I prevent the boy bidding farewell to the old man, who has always been so kind to him? One would think Hector had the plague, to hear you, Agnes. I shall run down myself for the same purpose as Clay."

As Captain Ashbur started for the train, Miss Comerford, who was standing on a log, slipped off with a scream, which she hoped would call back the departing gentleman to her assistance. He stopped for a moment and turned about; but, seeing that young Heron was supporting his cousin, resumed the race.

Tom, in return for his anxious inquiries about a sprained ankle, received a pinch and a sharp reproof for his awkwardness in hurting her foot, and could only conjecture that he had offended by coming to the rescue, instead of Hawthorn, who, standing farther off, was a moment too late.

Now, Nora Ryan, who was stationed some little distance nearer the passing train than were the party on the hill, noticed Captain Ashbur running due east, and just at that moment saw *something* that caused her to run as fast as she could due *south.* And thus it naturally fell out that their paths intersected, and nothing was more natural, *under the circumstances*, than that Nora should stumble and fall, and the gallant captain go, headforemost, over the barricade thus presented.

"What the devil was that for?" cried he, getting on his feet again. But, seeing Nora still prostrate, he paused to see if she were really hurt, and, meantime,

the train moved on, leaving his parting words to Uncle Hector unsaid.

Nora's hands were over her face, which was flushed, and she was shaken by a convulsion of pain,—or could it be laughter? She did not speak at first; indeed, the rack could not have drawn from her the true answer to the captain's first question of "*What was that for?*"

Certainly Mrs. Ashbur and Miss Kate were indulging in a burst of merriment which the gentleman considered quite disproportionate to the humorous side of his mishap.

A scene of some interest was also transpiring, at this time, beside the rear wagon of the train. Aunt Phebe had gone down to see her old friend off (for good reasons the ladies and Hector had confided their secret to her).

"Farewell, Uncle Hector; when you get to your destitution send me a letter," shouted Phebe, as she pressed into his hand a small bag of coin (Texas knew no paper money at that date), given her for this purpose by Miss Comerford. A good portion of Nora's wages was also in that bag, for O'Brien must find his way out of the country with as little delay as possible.

"Good-by, Uncle Hector," screamed Clay, who had just reached the wagon, throwing his arms around the old man's neck. "Oh, jiminy!" he screamed, starting back. "You are not Uncle Hec——"

"Whist, Clay, me boy! Don't you know me?"

said the voice of O'Brien, as he pressed the boy to his breast to smother his utterance. "I am fleeing for dear life, Clay, and one word from your mouth will ruin me intirely."

"I'll never betray you, O'Brien," whispered the boy. "They may cut my tongue out first."

Down he hopped, and sang out, as the train moved on, so that all might hear: "Good-by, and come back soon, Uncle Hector."

"Bless my boy! he's got sense," said Phebe, with her apron to her tearful eyes.

And when he returned slowly towards them without a word of his discovery, though his mother saw from the expression of his face that he knew all, she and Kate also blessed the boy in their hearts.

Clay was next seen to enter the chapel and kneel down. He was asking for strength to keep his word, and also offering an earnest petition for the fugitive's safety.

Perhaps the driver of the wagon in which O'Brien made the trip to San Antonio could not distinguish Hibernian from African, even when under his very nose; or, it may be, his eyes had been blinded by a little gold-dust and a good deal of blarney from Miss Nora. At any rate, he attended to the wants of his passenger himself, and as old Hector was ill-disposed (as he said), and inclined to sleep most of the day, the other teamsters saw very little of him, except at night, by the doubtful light of the camp-fires. If any one suspected the disguise, certainly no one felt called on to interfere, or wished to be the means of

sending back to a terrible punishment (and, as many thought, an unjust one) a man much beloved by his comrades.

The earnest prayer of Clay Ashbur was answered: O'Brien never suffered the punishment of a deserter.

Not many years later his innocence was fully established. A captured Comanche told the story of O'Brien's seizure by a party of Indians, and also told of the soldier's indignant refusal to act the part of traitor in leading his own people into an Indian ambush, which service was to have been the price of his own release. That O'Brien had spoken the truth and Boswell the lies in regard to the provocation offered and the knocking down of the latter also leaked out in course of time.

The day after the departure of the train old Hector, who had been playing hermit in the cave for some days, was seen coming slowly along the San Antonio road back to Fort Fairfax with his bundle on his shoulder. His master was informed that he had changed his mind and concluded to return, owing to a dream, and was determined to stay by the side of Miss Kate, for fear the Indians should carry her off if he were not by to defend her.

Miss Comerford, on thinking over her meeting with Mr. Volney on the night of the rescue, could come to only one conclusion: the unfortunate Paul had certainly lost his senses. His fancying an engagement so binding as to admit of no possible rupture —for had he not declared, on the night of Mrs. Sil-

vers's party, that he could not release her?—was strange enough; but to have the audacity to claim her as his wife——

CHAPTER X.

CHRISTMAS was near at hand. Beautiful hymns were being practised by the children, for the day was to be duly honored,—at least, as well as that happy and holy day could be kept where all the solemn and impressive rites of the Church must be dispensed with. No priest had ever visited this wild region. There would be no glorious midnight mass, no benediction.

Before or about the coming Easter it was hoped that a priest could be spared for a short visit from San Antonio. Children were looking forward to that time for making their first communion, and at least a dozen babies awaited baptism. All who could be pressed or coaxed into the service were busy in Christmas preparations.

Even an old Indian, of a religious turn of mind, on the last visit of his people to the post, had been so struck by what he heard of Christmas and Santa Claus that he begged to be permitted to take up his quarters near the soldiers, and wait to see the great Santa Claus. He seemed to be in doubt whether the coming Christmas was a tree which should spring miraculously from the ground, or a great bird which

was to come down from the heavens bringing gifts to men. And the soldiers, instead of instructing his ignorance, amused themselves by filling his mind with uncouth legends.

This man was not a Comanche, but had belonged to some milder-mannered tribe, having been taken captive in his youth. As he was now old and of little use to them, the Comanches readily consented to let him spend his Christmas holiday at Fort Fairfax.

He made himself useful by bringing in evergreen branches and vines, which the ladies wove into garlands for the decoration of their tents and of the chapel. The Christmas-tree was to be no cut-off affair, stuck in a tub, but a genuine growing tree, on whose boughs should hang numerous Chinese lanterns.

Mrs. Ashbur's pretty carpet was covered with the verdant spoils of the wood. Mrs. Silvers, Miss Comerford, and the children, assisted by Nora, whose cheeks had regained their color, were all at work, some of them seated on the floor.

Cindy, with her charge, little Willie Ashbur, crowing in her arms, was showing her white teeth in broad smiles as she permitted the boys to make a living Christmas-tree of her by wrapping her round and round with the woven evergreen garlands, and sticking sprigs of them in her woolly head.

"Miss Kate," said Alcibiades Duval, "you ought to have been at Dr. McBriar's dinner last evening, and heard the gentlemen telling yarns about the Mexican war."

"And pray, Master Alcy, who gave you an invitation to that dinner?" inquired Mrs. Ashbur.

"Oh, us boys invited ourselves. But we only stood on the outside of the tent and listened to the toasts and the stories. Major Silvers, he told of how he and Captain Ashbur and Dr. McBriar and some others of our officers, being prisoners of war, were taken to the City of Mexico. This was before old 'Fuss-and-Feathers' took the city."

"Stop, Alcy! are you not ashamed to speak of General Scott, our commander-in-chief, in that irreverent manner?" said Mrs. Silvers.

"Anyhow, that is what the major called him," was Alcy's retort.

The major's wife, of course, could say no more.

"And I heard father call General Taylor 'Old Rough-and-Ready,' and Dr. McBriar called General Scott 'A hasty plate of soup,'" continued the boy. "They were treated dreadful. I mean the prisoners, not the soup. And one morning, just for devilment, the American officers were harnessed into the bread-wagon like horses, and driven through the streets to fetch the bread for the breakfast of all the prisoners. Just as they were passing through the market-place, the horses pretended to scare. McBriar, who was one of the leaders, reared up and jumped to one side, and the whole team, eight of them, went snorting and nickering and kicking and plunging from side to side right through the market plaza, overturning the stands and the old women with their bananas and pine-apples."

"Whew!" cried Clay and Gussy, "don't we wish we were there to pick up the pine-apples!"

"Two Mexicans galloped after, on horseback, with their swords drawn, yelling, in Spanish, for them to 'Halt!' But the runaway horses pretended not to understand their lingo," continued Alcy. "A Mexican officer, who enjoyed a full view of the race from his palace window, was so amused by the spirit of the Yankee horses that he forbade such treatment, and sent for the gaily horses and apologized to them for the bad manners of his countrymen in treating prisoners of war so shamefully. And so they were treated like gentlemen after that until they were exchanged."

On Christmas eve, of course, the children's stockings were carefully hung up in every tent; and, although some alarming doubts were entertained by the youngsters that Santa Claus might not find his way to such an out-of-the-world place as Fort Fairfax, these were happily dispelled by the first dawn of morning.

Alcy, Clay, and Gus were determined, they said, to make a Christian of old Wako, the Indian, and began their missionary labors by constituting themselves his Santa Claus and stuffing one of Mrs. Duval's stockings from top to toe with numberless goodies for him, not forgetting to mix in with the cakes and candies a generous supply of tobacco.

The old man was as happy as a child, and the boys vowed that before he reached the toe of that stocking

he was nearer converted than if he had swallowed the whole catechism.

After devouring the sweet things, Wako had remarked, "Uh! me chuck full Christian all way up!"

After breakfast and the usual exchange of Christmas gifts, a procession was formed, consisting of every child in the garrison dressed in holiday attire, led by Mrs. Silvers and Miss Comerford, and flanked on either side by a guard of soldiers in single file, all singing merry Christmas carols.

This was the order of march: they went first to the tent of the commanding officer, halted in front, the soldiers fired a salute, and the children, accompanied by the voices of the soldiers, sang a carol. In this way the tents of each of the married officers were visited in turn.

Then every one turned out and followed the procession to the chapel, singing as they went the *Adeste Fideles*.

When the chapel-door was thrown open a really beautiful spectacle presented itself. The little edifice had been completely darkened, and was now in a glow of lighted tapers, evergreens, and flowers.

In front of the altar was arranged a lovely *Bethlehem*,—the figures all in white marble in a bower of evergreens. The Star of Bethlehem shone brightly, and a multitude of tiny white-robed angels hovered in the air above the grotto.

Many of the spectators had never before beheld a "*Bethlehem*," and they were impressed with its novelty and beauty.

The *Gloria in Excelsis* was sung, and many other Christmas hymns. Then the children intoned the *Litany of the Name of Jesus*, and thus concluded the little celebration.

"This is certainly a great improvement on our usual manner of spending Christmas day in garrison," said Colonel Comerford, "going, during the whole morning, from house to house drinking more egg-nogg than we can gracefully carry off. However, we shall partake of a glass of egg-nogg when we reach my tent. But we will indulge with moderation; there is no use in going the round of the garrison."

On leaving the chapel, as Lieutenant Hawthorn stepped forward to take his place by the side of Miss Comerford, he was almost rudely thrust aside by Lieutenant Volney, who took the lady's hand and placed it on his own arm, observing,

"I am sorry to offend, but this is my place."

Hawthorn looked at Miss Kate, that he might take his cue from her action; but, to his surprise, instead of repulsing Volney, she walked quietly on without attempting to release her hand, unwilling, indeed, to anger him, for she was more than ever convinced that Paul was acting under a delusion,—a temporary aberration of mind.

As soon as it was fairly dark, all the children (of soldiers as well as officers) were dancing around the great tree which stood in front of Major Silvers's tent, and which was now bearing Chinese lanterns and all manner of queer fruit for the little ones. But the

most highly prized fruit that grew on that Christmas-tree were the rosy-red apples which hung from its branches,—two for each child, the first they had tasted for a long, long time, and very possibly the last they should taste for some time to come, for these had been obtained in San Antonio at the modest price of two dollars a dozen.

The festivities of the day wound up with a dance at Mrs. Duval's, while the soldiers also held a grand hop in their half-finished quarters, Miss Nora and Bridget being the "stars of that goodly companie."

Although half engaged for the first set to Mr. Hawthorn, Miss Kate was allowed no choice, but was promptly claimed for that set by Mr. Volney.

"Miss Comerford can plead a previous engagement," said Hawthorn, wondering that she did not do so.

"Pardon me," said Volney, bowing with freezing dignity; "*this lady* (whatever Miss Comerford may do) will assure you that she and I are under an engagement which takes precedence of all others."

As Kate, pale with vexation and confusion, hastily said, "I will dance this one set with Mr. Volney, Mr. Hawthorn," and yielded herself to be led off (fearing to provoke a disturbance in a place so public), she heard Hawthorn say to the other:

"You shall answer to me for this, sir!"

"With pleasure; all in good time," was the stern reply.

When the set was finished Miss Comerford was invited by her partner to take a short promenade in

front of the tent, where all was as bright as day from the lights hung on the outside.

An appealing glance from Kate's blue eyes towards Hawthorn, or something he took for such, induced that gentleman to ask if he might bring his partner and join them in the open air.

"Come as you are, Mr. Hawthorn, without your partner," said Volney; "I want you to hear what I have to say to this lady."

Had it not been for her extreme reluctance to betray to her father the mortifying story of the frustrated elopement at Knocktin, Kate could, before this, have put a stop to this annoyance, and she now inwardly vowed to do so, rather than this persecution should continue.

As the three walked slowly about in the refreshing air,—the night was like one in Indian summer, and with no falling dew,—Volney abruptly began:

"Madam,"—he was determined not to address her as Miss Comerford,—"will you second me in assuring this gentleman that any rivalry between us is out of the question——"

"And I insist that Miss Comerford be allowed to choose between us, for I see that whatever your claim may be it is evidently an unwelcome one," interrupted Hawthorn.

"So much the worse for her and for myself, but this fact will not help you." Then, turning to Kate, he passionately exclaimed, "Were it possible, how gladly would I release you! Where were our good angels, yours and mine, Kate, that fatal night,

that we were permitted to commit a folly which has wrecked the happiness of both our lives? Let us at least act as becomes rational beings now, and not, like children, fight against the inevitable. Have you nothing to say to me?" Volney continued, after a pause, during which he had seemed to await a reply, fixing his large, sad eyes on Kate and turning very pale. "All I ask is that you assure Mr. Hawthorn that my claim on your allegiance cannot be set aside, —that you have forfeited the right of choosing between us, as he suggests."

"I have and claim the right," exclaimed the indignant girl, with flashing eyes. "I disown your insolent pretensions. Surely the most solemn promise is not so binding as you wish me to believe that childish and soon-repented engagement. I do not choose between you, but I claim Mr. Hawthorn's protection until I can place myself under that of my father."

As Mr. Hawthorn stepped quickly forward to lead her back into the tent, Volney standing for a moment as if petrified, young Heron, followed by Waters, ran in between the two young men.

Heron, catching Paul Volney by the arm, insisted that he must speak with him on a matter of life and death.

Mrs. Ashbur, too, appeared on the scene and hurried Miss Comerford into the house, bidding Mr. Hawthorn follow them.

Waters aided Heron in urging the distracted Volney to go at once with them to their quarters. What they had to say, they assured him, could not wait, and bore directly upon the present subject.

Volney, who began to believe he must be walking in his sleep, turning to Hawthorn, said, "Our engagement will keep for a few hours," then allowed himself to be hurried off between the two.

As the three walked rapidly on, Tom Heron could not help contrasting their present feelings with those entertained when this identical trio were taking a very different promenade on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande two years before.

He had promised his aunt to undeceive Volney weeks ago, but the trouble about O'Brien, together with Volney's or his own absence from the post on Indian scouts, had interfered. However, he had some days before written a full account of the part he had played,—a most candid explanation, joined to wholesale apologies,—and had intrusted the important document to Jack Waters to deliver to his friend.

The former, in his absent-minded way, had forgotten all about the paper, never supposing it more than some of Heron's doggerel lines. This unfortunate oversight had just transpired; and, observing the excited manner of Volney and his rival, whom they had been watching for some moments, the two officers had hastened to interfere. Certainly none too soon.

"Well!" exclaimed Volney, throwing himself into a chair and folding his arms as soon as Waters's tent was reached. That one word seemed all of which he was capable, but it expressed volumes.

"My dear Paul, you have been shamefully treated," began Jack Waters.

"No matter. What is that to you? I shall see to that. Hawthorn shall give me satisfaction, the villain!" the angry words fairly rolling over each other in his agitation.

"I am the villain to whom you must look for satisfaction, Volney," said Heron, looking and speaking seriously for once in his life. "Volney, you have been cruelly treated, but——"

"I tell you I am capable of avenging my own injuries. I want none of your pity."

"But *I* want yours," said Tom, "for when you know all, if you cannot pity and forgive a mischievous boy,—well, you will shoot me, that is all. And I will not raise a hand to save my own life, for I richly deserve it. I can only say that I was ignorant, at the time, of the magnitude of my offence. I see it now; and, so help me, my last practical joke has been played. Listen. Before we crossed the Rio Grande to attend the ball, Mrs. Silvers (and through her my aunt, Mrs. Ashbur) were in possession of your secret,—your intention of eloping with my cousin Kate. Allow me to say, Volney, that was rather shabby treatment of our *comandante*. I'll be shot if, with all my nonsense, I would steal off with any man's daughter——"

"Is it to listen to a lecture from this Solomon that I have been brought here?" broke out Volney, in angry remonstrance, appealing to Waters.

"No, no!" Tom hastened to say; "I am the culprit here, not the judge. These ladies, believing the colonel had some rights (pardon me), and that both of

you would in the future thank them for preventing this secret marriage, consulted with me, not because they trusted me as a Solomon, but simply because I was the only man to whom they could appeal. A word on the subject to Uncle George would have been all one as if spoken to the colonel. And how *not* to betray you and Waters to Colonel Comerford, and yet prevent the elopement, was the delicate problem intrusted to me. I saw but one means to that end, or, it may be, after this one took possession of my mind, I did not trouble myself to search for a better. This was to present myself in the *rôle* of the fair bride, while Mrs. Silvers and Aunt Agnes should detain my cousin in their room after enticing her from the ball-room. *I* overheard your appointment. *I* met you at the south door. This, truly, was to have been the extent of my masquerade. And for all that came after I alone am responsible, neither of the ladies knowing or approving of what I—prompted by Satan—was led on to do. Quite the contrary; and many are the beratings I have suffered from them for my pains."

"*Am* I to credit this?" asked Volney, again appealing to Waters, who, between indignation at his friend's treatment at the hands of this youth, joy that he began to see a way out of this medley of blunders, mixed up with irrepressible amusement at the figure he and Paul presented leading between them the fair Tom Heron as bride, stood with his big mouth half open, as if not quite decided whether to laugh or cry. "And you, too, Jack," continued Paul,—"*you* be-

trayed me to the women; you lent yourself to this young mountebank's plot" (shaking his fist at Tom), "to make me a laughing-stock!"

Anger and wounded feelings fought for the mastery in his voice.

"I assure you, Volney, I, and I alone, deserve your displeasure. Waters was as badly fooled as yourself," cried Heron. "And to prove that you are a free man, that my cousin is and always has been simply Kate Comerford, and that I am the only Mrs. Volney, I herewith return to you your wedding-ring." And he actually offered Volney the little gold hoop set with an opal which had been placed on his *little* finger on that memorable night in Mexico.

Volney sent the ring flying through the tent-door out into the starry Christmas night. And if ever it was used again as a troth-plight, some dusky savage may have placed it on the hand of his fawn-colored bride.

"Young man," said he, "I should like to send you flying after that ill-omened ring."

"Do, if it will ease your mind," said Heron. "I deserve it."

"And all this time I have been playing the fool for your amusement! Why the deuce, when you had succeeded in putting a stop to my folly, could you not make a clean breast of it to me, and save me all this perplexity?"

"Because I was afraid of your wrath then, but trusted to the effects of time and reflection in cooling you off and making you aware of the gratitude you

owe me for frustrating your—folly, as you well term it."

"You are aware of the responsibility you have incurred. You are ready, I presume, to abide by the consequences, for I shall call you out; or do you expect your boyishness to be your shield?"

"I am quite ready to fight you, Volney, if you insist upon it," said Heron, with dignity; "but, having acknowledged my fault and begged your pardon, I cannot see the necessity for bloodshed."

"And Miss Comerford knew she was not my wife,—that I was being made a fool of,—and yet she said not one word to enlighten me or save me from mortification," continued Paul, as if speaking to himself, paying no attention to Heron's words.

"Paul, if I understand aright, Miss Comerford knows nothing whatever of the mock wedding," observed Waters.

"Not a syllable," said Tom. "She, of course, has known she was not your wife, but neither has she dreamed that you thought her so."

"Then she must have thought me a madman! While I have been insisting upon my rights as a husband, she has surely thought I alluded to our engagement. Indeed, I believe she said as much, now that I look back. Oh, what a confounded mess altogether!"

"Volney," whispered Waters, taking him to one side, "is it not true that your pride is more touched than your heart in all this? Think of your escape. This fickle girl has evidently lost all affection for you.

Now, *do* try to be thankful that she is not bound to you for life. Look on the bright reverse of the shield: you have nothing to fear from our chief,—no wrong done him, to be acknowledged with shame. And you are free! free to follow the bent of your own heart.

"Come now, Paul, admit that you had repented of that hasty step. Had not your heart slightly strayed from its allegiance? Is there no sweet Virginia in San Antonio who will rejoice at your release, and whose love will doubly compensate you for the loss of this blue-eyed lassie?"

"Jack, I have been miserable for months,—have been calling myself all the hateful names going, *fickle*, *dishonorable*, and so on,—because, forsooth, my affections had inadvertently wandered from one who, all the time, cared naught for me,—was more fickle than myself. But, on my honor, if my heart wandered, my words, my actions, were ever true to her I believed my wife. I made no love to the one you call Virginia,—at least not in words: my eyes *may* have betrayed my secret.

"I *did* love that blue-eyed witch. Yes, I once loved her to distraction," continued Paul Volney, heaving a profound sigh in memory of his dead and buried first love. "But now, if I could get away from this hateful post without again having to face Kate Comerford, or—or the man she prefers to me" (here oozed out a little of the dog-in-the-manger bitterness to which inconstant man is prone), "I might yet have some peace of my life, and even be induced

to forego the pleasure of soundly thrashing that young jackanapes."

"I say, Volney," said Heron, coming forward; "I know that last complimentary title is intended for me. Let us cry quits. I'll forgive you for calling me names, and you will forgive me for saving you your name intact, ready for future bestowal. Indeed, you owe me something, for have I not on your account foresworn my beloved practical jokes? I always liked you, Paul."

Here Tom Heron held out his hand, looking so confident of forgiveness, so boyish in his fair beauty, indeed, so strikingly like his cousin, that a harder heart than beat in Paul Volney's breast must have felt that to bear malice for the past was out of the question.

"Go to thunder with your girlish ways!" he cried, giving the hand a vice-like grip by way of punishment, while good-natured Jack Waters grinned from ear to ear, standing over them like a benevolent, peace-making *brownie.*

"See here, Heron!" cried Volney, as if a sudden idea had struck him, "why did you not seize the opportunity of undeceiving me when I met you on the night of O'Brien's escape,—you and old Hector,—and begged you to ask your cousin to grant me a hearing?"

"What!" said Tom; "that is news to me. Why, I was not out——"

Here he came to an abrupt pause, as if at least a dozen ideas had struck *him.* Then he slowly added,

"Oh, well, I don't exactly know why; not knowing, can't say."

With this vague and unsatisfactory reply, Tom Heron gave a long low whistle, and, dropping back into his chair, fell into a brown study.

"Whew!" communed Tom with himself; "I begin to scent a most astounding rodent. A fair exchange is no robbery. I play Kate. *She* borrows my coat to darn and *dons* it, and plays Lieutenant Heron; *Uncle Hector* is seen with her. Hm! hm! A black smear gets on my shoulder-strap—doubtless a bit of the complexion of the African O'Brien. As sweet a chain of circumstantial evidence as need be!

"Then comes scene on the hill near the chapel: Departure of O'Brien in the distance. My uncle George starts on a run to bid him farewell. My cousin Kate tries to distract his attention by pretending to be hurt; while Nora, the plucky girl, casts herself bodily into the breach and effectually prevents the meeting! Only to think of it! a whole garrison of men outwitted and bamboozled by a couple of girls. Hurrah for them! *I'll* never betray them. But won't I have some little fun with Miss Kate?"

Tom Heron went back to the Christmas dance whistling as he went,—

> "'Tis best to be off with the old love
> Before you are on with the new."

Volney could not help laughing, in which he was heartily joined by Jack Waters.

"Jack," he said, "if some one else had figured as the hero of Tom's comedy, I could enjoy the fun. What a fund of amusement I have proved to that harebrained boy!"

"Volney, our chief was thinking of sending me in a few days to San Antonio in command of the escort of the next train. I will get your name substituted for mine. Leave Heron and myself to explain things in general and settle matters with Hawthorn. Tom assures me that no one except Mrs. Silvers and Mrs. Ashbur and ourselves knows a word of this affair. Those ladies have not even confided in their husbands, being rather ashamed of their part in the plot, I fancy."

Volney's several attempts to define his position and apologize for his rudeness in a farewell letter to Miss Comerford were somewhat ludicrous. One epistle opened with reproaches for her fickleness in so soon forgetting him, trusting that her present adorer might make haste to secure her before she once more changed her mind. This was destroyed; and the next effort was quite confused in expression between an endeavor to hide from his first love his own want of fidelity, and at the same time to assure her she need not flatter herself that she had broken his heart. Finally he gave up in despair, threw aside his pen, and wisely concluded to see Kate and trust to his tongue to help him through the difficulty.

When Paul Volney and Kate Comerford—the momentous interview over—shook hands as good friends, both had reached the self-evident conclusion that

no girl of sixteen or youth of twenty could possibly know their own minds well enough to be trusted to decide on the choice of a partner for life.

Jack Waters was of opinion that the best chance of happiness for all parties lay in the French custom of allowing the parents to settle such affairs. Certainly, after this experience, *he* would never meddle with other men's wooings.

Hawthorn was shocked beyond measure on finding that the woman to whom he had intrusted his heart had, at one time, been only saved from a clandestine marriage with another by the interference of her wiser friends. Perhaps the shadow of this disappointment appeared in his manner. Certainly there was, for a short time, a perceptible distance and coldness in their intercourse.

This sweet convent-bred flower was not, as he had foolishly believed, destined to yield its first perfume for him. Alas! by how many thorns of reality is the romance of our youth beset and wounded! How seldom is the beautiful heart-dream permitted to unfold into perfection and become a part of our life,—"a thing of beauty and a joy forever"!

Our purest earthly gems betray a flaw; our sweetest flowers lose their perfume or perish in the handling. Only one love can fully satisfy the human heart,—the soul. Only one can equal, can surpass all our hopes. In vain look we elsewhere for that perfect happiness for which the weary heart so yearns,—that happiness which in youth we almost claim as our due. Not in earthly love is such perfect joy to be found.

Something is ever wanting. Oh, that we might early learn this truth and seek this "pearl of price" where only it may be found, and thus open our hearts to receive hereafter those joys prepared for us of which it has not entered the heart of man to conceive!

Such thoughts awoke in the troubled soul of Hawthorn.

CHAPTER XI.

AMONG the books with which Mrs. Silvers and Miss Comerford—with sometimes the assistance of Lieutenant Hawthorn—entertained their pupils was Cardinal Wiseman's "Fabiola." This story so took possession of the fancy of the soldiers that one of their number, a selfish and cruel fellow, was christened "Corvinus." Lieutenant Boswell, less of a favorite than ever, would not have been flattered, had he condescended to read the book, by his alias of "Fulvius." Miss Comerford was sometimes addressed by the children as "the Lady Agnes," though the resemblance was not very perceptible; while Nora refused to assume the title of "Syra" or "Miriam:" she could not consent to be a slave even for the sake of winning a "Fabiola." Moreover, she was no sister of the "Fulvius" of Fort Fairfax. "Faith, an' if she might be the Emperor Maximian, he should furnish a male for the wild bastes, if they would bemane themselves by eating such a dirty morsel."

The death of the poor blind girl on the rack brought tears to the eyes of more than one soldier, while the pathetic account of the suffering and death of the dear child who bore on his breast the Holy Eucharist, and yielded his young life rather than his precious trust should suffer profanation, deeply moved the hearts of all. Hawthorn's voice trembled as he read.

When the beheading of St. Agnes was reached, little Winny threw her arms around the neck of Kate in a transport of grief, crying that the wicked men should not have the head of her dear Agnes.

"Why, Winny, I am not in the least like St. Agnes. I have not chosen the better part," said Kate, caressing the child.

"I am glad of it," said Hawthorn, over whose mind there flitted a vision of this bright young girl in the sombre robes of a nun; her flaxen curls shorn and her head covered; her thoughts withdrawn from earth. "You are best fitted for a life in the world. Indeed, I look upon this withdrawing from the duties and hardships of our lot as marked out for us by Providence, to the quiet shelter of the convent, as a species of cowardice,—a declining to put the hand to the plough."

"This it might be for some persons," said Mrs. Silvers. "You, perhaps, fancy a nun's life one of entire ease and freedom from care. You have not seen them at work from five o'clock in the morning until night, with but one hour for recreation, and even this sacrificed when duty calls. You do not

know how difficult it is, even for women, to be ever resigning their own wills to their superiors. I am sure I often find it hard to yield to the authority of my husband, especially in trifles. Remember, too, nuns are neither angels nor saints; and their life, though in the main a happy one, is yet subject to the worry of the variations of temper and other imperfections of their sisters. A sister of charity, or of mercy, praying by the side of the dying, or presenting a bowl of broth to a sick soldier in the hospital, gives us only the romantic and pleasing side of the picture. But to the share of these devoted women fall all manner of repulsive offices and wearing cares in their attendance on the sick. Closing the eyes and performing the last services for the dead in a plague-smitten district is not a duty which comes easy to human nature. Caring for the insane, at risk of life or limb, with all that patience and tenderness which their pitiful fate bespeaks, may be a glorious act in the sight of the angels of God, but not a duty willingly embraced by one who flies to the convent as a refuge from the common trials of life."

"Mr. Hawthorn, don't you wish you had lived in the times of the martyrs?" said Alcibiades Duval. "The soldiers call you 'Sebastian.' Wouldn't you look well stuck all over with arrows? If I had been Sebastian, I should not have thanked Fabiola for having me brought to life and robbing me of my martyr's crown."

"I should have been Pancratius," said Clay.

"What fun he and Quadratus had pulling down the emperor's edict!"

"But you must be killed by the panther at last if you are Pancratius," said Gustavus Duval. "Now, I would just have prayed for the very angel who shut the mouths of Daniel's lions to come down and hold that panther until I could kill him."

"Where den would be your martyr's crown?" said old Aunt Phebe, who had joined the listening crowd in the chapel.

"What I like especially about this book," said Miss Comerford, "is that throughout the Christians have the best of it. They escaped the traitor Torquatus in the catacombs; the *fox* and the *wolf* were both outwitted and turned out in disgrace when they intruded into the house of Agnes; Fulvius fails in all his plots; Pancratius and his friend are not discovered in their daring raid on the edict. In fine, the Christians even succeed in their hearts' desire of gaining the crowns of martyrdom. I never like those novels in which the good people are continually in trouble, and the wicked enjoying the best of everything, up to the end of the third volume, when they are mercifully killed off, instead of being made to suffer for their misdeeds in this world."

Soon after this discussion on "Fabiola," the boys arranged a play.

"Clay," said Alcy, "let us play martyrs. I will be Pancratius, and give all my jewels and plate to be divided among the poor,—that is, I'll give my

mother's. If she is not willing, she ought to be. Christians ought to be as charitable now as in the old times. After that, I will be Quadratus, and you may be Pancratius, and Gussy shall be the barbarian sentinel that guards the edict."

"And Winny shall be—not St. Agnes, because we cannot cut her head off, but—Joan of Arc. I 'spose she lived about the same time," said Clay.

"We will build a funeral *pie* and tie her to the stake, and make believe to burn her alive."

It so happened that the flag-staff had fallen, struck by lightning some thought; struck by a heavy wagon drawn by a runaway team of mules was the more likely solution. At any rate, while a new pole was being prepared, a temporary one, a tent-pole, not more than twelve feet in height, had the honor of bearing the Stars and Stripes.

This flag, these audacious aspirers after martyrdom thought, would answer, upon a pinch, for the emperor's proclamation.

But first, taking in charge his mother's box of jewelry, without leave asked, for fear she might fail to emulate the ancient Christians in generosity, Alcibiades, in his *rôle* of Pancratius, followed by his admiring friends, delivered the contents to the poor at the house of Agnes. This house was represented by a hollow stump of a tree near the chapel. The ants and grasshoppers played the part of the poor people, and would have been more grateful for a few crumbs than for the shining rings, bracelets, and necklaces that greeted their astonished eyes.

Then Quadratus and Pancratius (Clay Ashbur acted the latter this time), following, as closely as possible, the manœuvres of their prototypes, climbed the flag-staff, being assisted by the traitorous sentinel Gussy; and these lads actually succeeded in cutting the flag from the pole and making off with it. The sentinel (Gus) could not be persuaded to remain at his post to answer the inquiries of Corvinus.

The flag, or proclamation, was destined to be burned in the house of Diogenes; but, no matches being at hand, it was carefully buried.

Winny, as Joan of Arc, was to be the next victim, and she was led by her captors to the funeral pyre. A bright tin bucket was her helmet, and the top of the bucket formed her breast-plate. This second play was acted after dark of a starlight night in the *lignum vitæ* grove. The Maid of Orleans was bound to the stake; Gus Duval delivered a most touching funeral oration, while Clay and Alcy made believe to light the fagots. Unfortunately, a lighted match fell from their hands on the dried leaves. In a moment the twigs were in a blaze; Winny's apron caught fire, and the child would certainly have perished had not a tall figure, which had been watching their movements, sprung forward, thrown his cloak over her, and snatched the screaming child from her impending fate.

"You young scamps!" cried the sonorous voice of Lieutenant Boswell; "you ought to be flogged alive. What deviltry will you be at next. Begone home!"

"Oh, Mr. Boswell," cried Winny, "dey did not mean to hurt me; we's des been payin' martyrs."

Here ends the act of the Texas martyrs, for when the stolen flag was traced to their hands their angry papas took the place of the emperor's executioner, and the punishment was so severe that, as Alcy afterwards remarked to his fellow-sufferers, he thought the wild beasts had got him sure.

Tom Heron said that the poor boys got all the *stripes*, while Mr. Boswell walked off with the *stars*, for the ladies would gladly have bestowed on him the order of the Star and Garter in gratitude for Winny's rescue.

With little Winny and the dishonored flag occupying the foreground, Mrs. Duval made no complaint about her jewelry, especially as it all came to light the next day, strung about the neck of the old Indian, who supposed Santa Claus had left it in the stump for him. He willingly resigned it for some tobacco and a red blanket.

It was early on one cool evening in January. Mrs. Ashbur and Miss Comerford sat at their sewing, drawn up before the fire in the tent of the former.

Clay and Winny were in the bedroom, and were heard, through the curtain which divided the rooms, chattering away as they cracked and ate pecans. Little George was asleep on the hearth-rug at his mother's feet, while the baby slumbered peacefully in his crib, near which, on the floor, also asleep, lay his nurse, with one hand still grasping the rocker.

"Mrs. Ashbur," said Miss Kate, dropping the dress sleeve on which she had been sewing and gazing into the fire as if the bright coals had awakened the idea, "there is one heathen custom it is a pity we cannot revive,—that is, reversing the parties. What a sensible arrangement it would be if, when a man is left a widower, he should permit himself to be decently burned on his wife's funeral pyre, instead of living to make a fool of himself and being a bother to all the young girls around him!"

"What now? Has Rubenstein been proposing by 'epistolary word of mouth,' as Aunt Phebe says?"

"Worse! I did not know the former Mrs. Rubenstein; and I can imagine a girl accepting a widower under such circumstances, for she would only think of her predecessor as a shadow or myth, just as I only half believe in the reality of the existence of my little sister, who died before I was born. But how a man whose wife I have known and loved so recently can expect me to take her place is beyond belief."

"You do not mean to say that Captain Francisco has been courting you!" exclaimed Mrs. Ashbur.

"Not at all. He has dispensed with the usual formalities, and popped the question without giving me the slightest warning. Having gone through the ordeal of courtship once, he perhaps thinks that should suffice for a lifetime, as one preface serves for all the volumes of a book."

"While *you* think courtship, like grace before meat, should be repeated each time," said Mrs. Ashbur.

"Certainly, though not in the same form of words. He throws his heart (what is left of it), his sword, and his child at my feet. Very much mistaken is Captain Francisco if he fancies I take this as a compliment. He wants a mother or governess for his daughter, and I am honored because he has no choice." And Kate tossed her curly head.

"One might well do worse than to accept him; and any number of girls to choose from would probably make no difference in the result. He is kindness and honor personified, and is quite free from one fatal habit only too prevalent among army officers,—gambling. A woman whose husband is guiltless of this vice is spared many hours of anguish. Nothing more effectually vitiates the taste for simple home joys and amusements. It is a passion which undermines and usurps the place of family affection. I sometimes think it even more debasing to the spirit than love of drink." Mrs. Ashbur, unconsciously, spoke with such feeling that her deductions seemed drawn from personal experience.

"He is good-tempered, too," she continued. "Kate, whatever you do, never marry a passionate man. Our neighbor, Mrs. Brown, has that cross to bear; and I often think the constant turmoil that man keeps up at home is one thing that has driven her to the dangerous pastime of flirtation as a means of forgetting home troubles. He once, not long since, flew into a towering passion with his wife, and pitched the glass of lemonade she was handing him through the window, breaking a pane of glass, which cannot be

replaced for weeks, all because he could not find his sash, which was at that very moment hitched on to his coat-button and trailing behind him as he stalked up and down the floor.

"When we were first married, George was somewhat given to these little outbursts of temper, but I soon cured him. Coming home one night out of humor, instead of thanking me for keeping his supper hot, he vented his spleen on the unoffending teapot by kicking it into the fire. I knew he did not care much for tea at supper when good rich milk could be had. So, after emptying the hot biscuit and fried oysters on the coals, I deliberately poured over them the pitcher of milk, at the risk of *drying up the cow*, as a libation to the Furies, as I quietly told George. I have not lost a teapot in that way from that day to this.

"Once at table he so far forgot himself as to throw a plate of buckwheat-cakes at Aunt Phebe's head because they were not as hot as his temper. As luck would have it, an orderly entered our dining-room with a message from the commanding officer just at this auspicious moment. Pretending to mistake him for the waiter, I threw the plate of butter at *his* head, scolding him sharply for putting strong butter on the table. My husband's astonishment left no room for his anger. I find holding up the mirror thus to let him see how ridiculous we become while giving way to passion has been of great service.

"But I beg Captain Francisco's pardon. If you decline the honor of being Winny's step-mamma,

there is no more to be said. Perhaps you have determined to hedge yourself about with *Hawthorn*, and leave the rest of the bachelors in despair? Or have you nipped even those blossoms in the bud? I have fancied a coldness between you of late."

"That Hawthorn has been touched by a hoar-frost. The man is too nearly perfect to tolerate the faults of less favored mortals. The least speck of dust on the lily obscures all its purity in his eyes. With thoughts fixed on some perfect posy painted by his imagination, he stumbles over the humble flowers in his path," said Kate, with some bitterness.

"While seeking the cold and brilliant diamond, he fails to secure the *opal* with its heart of fire," said Mrs. Ashbur. "The moral to be drawn from all these similes is this: Let not pride and resentment stand in the way of happiness when the diamond-seeker shall return to beg for the opal."

The maiden blushed; she had not thought to be so quickly comprehended.

"Has the doctor retired hopeless? I believe the old gentleman has been all along in dead earnest, though he has thought best to wear a half-jesting mask, that in case of defeat he might retire without too great a shock to his dignity," observed Mrs. Ashbur, to change the subject.

"He perseveres with a devotion worthy a better cause. After explaining to me all about the action of the human heart, its pulsations, etc., and proving the impossibility of *breaking* that organ (though it was quite possible to make it *bleed*, as I often did

his!), and how an accumulation of fat, which smothered the heart, was often taken for the effects of love, he metaphorically took his heart in his hand and presented it to me. 'Take it, Cousin Kate,' cried Tom, 'and let us dissect it and see how many impressions of pretty girls are imprinted thereon; a whole photograph-gallery, I'll be bound.'

"On my declining to receive the valuable gift, as I had no suitable urn in which to preserve it and it was too inflammable to be left about the house,—he said it was already *preserved*,—he offered it as a *sweetheart;* and I ought not to look a gift horse in the mouth!"

"Dare, Clay!" little Winny was heard to say, "did not I tole you when I give you dat candy horse you ought not to took his head in your mouf? You hear what de doctor say?"

"Oh, you don't understand, Winny. Dr. McBriar talks what papa calls *metaphysics*. But I, when I grow up to be a navy officer, will bring you home diamonds as big as your head, and opals with fiery hearts, and posies and *lilies* without any dust on them."

"Those terrible infants!" exclaimed Kate. "Have they been listening to our whole conversation? It is to be hoped that my reflections on the introduction of the *suttee* escaped them."

"Children, it is time for you to be asleep. Wake Cindy, and let her undress you," said Mrs. Ashbur.

CHAPTER XII.

LIEUTENANT HAWTHORN and Colonel Comerford had resumed their games of chess, but of late, readings had sometimes taken the place of the game. Hawthorn read well,—a rare gift. The book in hand this evening was the last volume of the "Marble Faun," by the reader's namesake.

"A rare and wonderful genius, this Hawthorne!" said the colonel. "What grace and purity of style!"

"One of the few truly original writers America has produced," said Hawthorn, keeping his place with his finger between the leaves. "Not one of your surface writers. How ingeniously the mystery about Donatello's ears is preserved. To the last we are left in doubt if he be quite human."

"The most pathetic scene to me is where Donatello, after his fall, fails in his endeavor to call to him the wild creatures of the woods,—'the furry and feathered people.' He sobs: '*Death! death! they know it! They shun me! all nature shrinks from me, and shudders at me. I live in the midst of a curse that hems me round with a circle of fire. No innocent thing can come near me,*'" quoted Kate.

"If Donatello," said Hawthorn, who was reading the book for the first time, "is a type of man before and after the fall, are we to infer that through repentance man is gifted with a higher degree of intelligence,

a greater capacity for happiness, than would have been ours had we remained in a state of innocence? Miriam says, 'She who beguiled him into evil might guide him to a higher innocence than that from which he fell.'"

"In the last pages of the book, which I have glanced over," said Miss Comerford, "I see that Kenyon has anticipated you in making these deductions, and thereby has greatly shocked Hilda. But I see not why Almighty God might not thus bring good out of evil, and vanquish Satan by giving us even more than the Evil One had hoped, through sin, to deprive us of. It would seem meet that the costly price paid for our redemption should have bought for us infinitely more than would have been ours had we remained sinless."

"These are deep subjects," said her father. "Who was Miriam? There is a hint that she is a real personage, although I half believed her a symbol of Donatello's conscience, or of his repentance."

"I cannot imagine," said Hawthorn. "I should like to have a glass of the *Monte Beni Sunshine* to wash the remembrance of that dead monk from my mind."

"I regret that a man of such genius should have been so blinded," said Kate,—"not the monk, but the novelist. What horrible things he says of the Church! Yet what he writes of the confessional shows such utter ignorance that we must pardon his abuse on that score."

"My namesake has a knack of choosing taking titles

for his works. What could be more suggestive of romance than "The House of the Seven Gables"? The character of Clifford Pyncheon, the worshipper of the beautiful, who, lacking the stamina of the martyr, was yet called on to endure a martyr's fate, is most delicately delineated."

"I am almost ashamed to say," remarked Colonel Comerford, "of all the characters of that book I best remember the aristocratic Pyncheon chickens. Kate has some frizzly chickens which remind me of them."

"I shall call them Phebe and Clifford," said Kate, laughing.

"The Indians are here again, Aunt Aggy," said Tom Heron, "and if you still want those moccasins I will bring up Black Cloud or Thunder-and-Lightning, or some other *rai*ning chief, to take your measure."

"Do, Tom; for my last pair of slippers is giving out. Kate also wants a pair; as you pass, tell her to come over and be measured," said his aunt.

"Prairie Dog" was the cognomen of the knight of the plains who condescended to be shoemaker for the ladies, though he, probably, only cut the moccasins out, and left the squaws to do the work.

The ladies were found seated under the fly or awning in front of Mrs. Ashbur's tent when Lieutenant Heron approached, accompanied by a good-natured looking Indian, wrapped in a gay Mexican blanket, although the day was mild, as Easter was almost at hand.

"Ladies, allow me to present you a gentleman of the canine family, Monsieur Prairie Dog."

The Indian touched his forehead with his forefinger, as he had seen the soldiers do, and made a not ungraceful obeisance and said, "How do?" Making signs for the ladies to remove their shoes, he took their measures by simply placing the foot on a piece of bark and tracing the outline of the sole thereon.

Little Winny Francisco also insisted on having a pair of "*beaded moccas*," and while the red man took her measure she looked up into his face and said, "Now don't you *talp* my foot, Mr. Prairie Dog."

Little George ran away as fast as his short legs could take him; he placed no faith in the friendship of the Indians.

When, some days later, the moccasins were brought home, the amusement of the ladies equalled their surprise to find them, instead of being slipper fashion, made to reach above the knee. On being told that the continuations were superfluous, Prairie Dog said, "Ugh! Squaws no wear low shoe; that kind man's moccasins." But he agreed to make them some of the masculine kind, and the long ones, which were handsomely ornamented with beads and fringe, were kept as curiosities.

CHAPTER XIII.

"COME with me, Cousin Tom," said Miss Kate, as she stood in the door of her father's tent, looking as cool and dewy as a posy in her blue gingham dress and coquettish little white apron, her straw hat in hand. "I want your help in setting out the young trees received by the last train. We intend to have the grounds around the chapel as paradisaical as possible before Easter."

"My dear cousin, if you had just gone through the battalion drill, especially the Shanghai double-quick, in such weather as this and in a heavy coat,—why can't those old fogies at Washington give us a lighter uniform for this climate?—you would feel more like a quiet swing in a hammock than rooting holes in the ground to put in trees where Nature never meant they should grow." Here Tom unceremoniously drew off his coat and threw himself into the colonel's reclining camp-chair, which stood under the awning.

"Perhaps the doctor will not refuse to assist me," said Kate, as that worthy gentleman, arrayed in full dress, came puffing up, flourishing his neat little surgeon's sword.

"Miss Kate," he began, "see for yourself what an estimate is put on my good looks and noble presence. Whenever the object is to make a grand and imposing

display, the surgeon is called out to give brilliancy to the parade. Umph! I could dispense with the compliment in hot weather. How cool you look! As refreshing as a glass of lemonade."

"Uncle Hector," said Miss Comerford, laughing at the delicate hint, "put down your basket and tell Martha to make us some lemonade."

The old man, who was standing, spade in hand, waiting his young mistress's pleasure, started on his errand.

"One would not suppose that a girl could be induced to exchange that cool and becoming costume for a coat like mine," said Heron, reflectively, gazing at his pretty cousin; "yet on emergencies it has been done."

His cousin turned suddenly and looked at him, then quietly remarked: "Joan of Arc, for instance, donned a coat of mail. Do you not think her excusable?"

"When the object was to save her country, yes. But when the object of the masquerade is to subvert discipline, law, and order, and not even with the view of saving a lover,—at least, one's own,—I cannot give my high approval to the rash act. *Apropos* to nothing, Kate, might not you and I get up a little drama in characters of the twins, Catharine and Henry Seaton? I know a Roland Graeme who could be—has been—completely deceived, and, as Henry Seaton says, in the 'Abbot,' 'did not know the hart from the hind.'"

"Has Heron been playing some of his boyish

pranks at your expense, Miss Kate?" said the doctor. "It will be a sad Comedy of Errors if you are to be held answerable for his doings."

"Na, na, it's nae the *hart* that is in fault the day, but the *hind*," laughed Tom. "I should not care to be responsible for the acts of some young lassies I know."

"Tom," said his cousin, "take this glass of lemonade—and may it choke you!" she mentally added. "You can have my horse for the hunt to-morrow, and anything else you want, if you will but hold your tongue." This was spoken in an undertone as she leaned over him.

"All right. I am discretion itself; especially towards the one now approaching."

Miss Comerford looked up and saw Lieutenant Hawthorn coming in their direction.

"What has kept you so long getting this lemonade, Uncle Hector?" said Miss Kate, coloring with vexation at her cousin.

"Why, you see, miss, them misch*ee*vous boys got at our *ollas* and filled them with gravel and little fishes, making what they call *a-whaleiums* of them, and so spiled all our cold water, and I had to borrow the loan of some water from Mrs. Silvers."

The method adopted for cooling water at Fort Fairfax was to keep it in very porous earthenware jars (*ollas*), wrapped in wet flannel, the evaporation bringing the water down to a palatable temperature.

"Here comes the very man to assist you in setting out trees, cousin," cried Tom, as the lady of the

house welcomed Mr. Hawthorn and handed him a glass of their innocent beverage. "He knows all about the habits of trees and shrubs. I can only speak from experience of the habits of the *birch.* In my youth I found it of active habit and cruel disposition."

"I know more about plants and trees than both of these youths put together, Miss Kate," declared the doctor, with his usual modesty, jumping up. "I am ready to perform all the labors of Hercules for your sake. I dote on setting out trees. If you want, for instance, a *hawthorn* planted, I'll dig a hole and put him in with the greatest pleasure in life; though I would rather plant him horizontally, so he will not be seen above ground again."

"No one can doubt your expertness, from long practice, in preparing the tenants of the underground beds, but you should not fatigue yourself by doing double duty, doctor," retorted Hawthorn.

"It is growing late, and we have much to do," said Miss Comerford; "so come on, Uncle Hector, and as many more as feel disposed for work."

As the little party walked along the terrace towards its eastern slope, and then turned south and began ascending the hill to the chapel, Kate Comerford was wondering what effect Heron's discovery, if revealed to him, would have on the mind of her fastidious lover,—whether he might regard her doings of that memorable night as more than dust on the petals of the lily; rather as a metamorphosis of that sweet flower into a flaunting weed. Yet had she not

saved a brave man from unmerited disgrace, and a true-hearted girl from despair? Did she repent now? Never!

The shrubs and trees were already on the ground, and most of the holes dug. The question to be decided was where to plant each tree.

"These trees are emblematic," said Mrs. Silvers, who, with the children, had been waiting an hour for Miss Comerford. "This *aspen* should go just here at the right of the door. You know the legend tells us that the cross was made of this wood, and ever since its leaves have trembled with awe."

"Then shall we call these evergreens cedars of Lebanon, and plant them on the north side of the chapel?" said Hawthorn.

"The passion-flowers, which I found growing wild," said Kate, "I shall put here, so they may run over the aspen and climb to the roof of the chapel;" and she knelt to plant her vines, while Hawthorn and McBriar put in the trees, holding them upright while Uncle Hector shovelled the earth about the roots.

"The lilies of the valley—here is one in bloom—must grow at the foot of the aspen-tree," said Mrs. Silvers.

"That is my emblem," said Tom Heron, who had followed the party, but took no part in the labor, and stood with folded arms leaning against the wall, "for I toil not, neither do I spin."

"And here, back of the chapel, so they will receive the eastern sun and escape the rays from the west, I shall put these large white lilies,—St. Joseph's

lilies. Will they not be lovely on the altar when they bloom?" said Kate, who had finished setting out the vines.

"Let me set the blue-and-white wild daisies near your lilies of the valley, Mrs. Silvers," requested Dr. McBriar. "They seem to me to symbolize the prayers of little children."

Mrs. Silvers consented, with a look of surprise at this unexpected piece of sentiment from such a source.

"Miss Kate, moughtn't I plant some morning-glory seed I fotched from home, so as to have the vines running over the door? They is of a heavenly blue color, and opens their cups early of a morning, so as to take into their hearts the blessing and glory of the Lord. Then at night they close up, like a baby wrapped in its little blanket, so as to keep safe all the blessings they has received in the daytime."

"Certainly, Uncle Hector, and I shall prize the morning-glory hereafter for the sake of your thought," said his young mistress.

"If we stay here much longer we shall all become poets," remarked Tom; "this must be Mount Parnassus."

"I should not mind being buried here, if you would all promise to come often and sing a hymn over my grave," observed the doctor.

"Out of her grave there grew a red rose,
And out of his grew a McBriar-ri-ria,"

sang Heron.

"There is another Bible plant which would be re-propriate here," ventured Uncle Hector.

No one could remember to what the old man alluded.

"That shows you Catholics don't read your Bibles very careful," said he; "at least that is what our ministers say," he added, in apology. "But I tells the Methodists it is them as does the works of the Lord, showin' marcy to the poor and feedin' the hungry, more than them that only reads the good Book, which finds favor in the sight of Heaven. And this is what many Catholics do, and for these good works the Lord will, in his own good time, enlighten their ignorance. The prophet Jonah, he planted a *gourd*, and we mought follow his example and plant another right here."

This serious proposition was received in silence, and lips were bitten to keep back the smiles.

Tom came to the rescue with, "Gourds will not grow unless planted by a poor man, Uncle Hector, and I am afraid we are all too rich to start one."

"May be so," assented the Biblical scholar. "I've done laid up considerable of the filthy lucre for a rainy day myself."

"That is more than any of the rest of us can say," said Mrs. Silvers. "Army officers, like Methodist preachers, are always poor, and always moving from place to place."

The children in the mean time had not been idle. They had made a bed near the southeast corner of the chapel, and had planted about a pint of pickled

olive-seed, in the hope of raising a scriptural crop. Winny had also put in a few dried figs.

"You are the only *olive-branches* we can reckon on with any certainty," said Dr. McBriar. "Before your trees grow we shall be sent to some post hundreds of miles from Fort Fairfax."

"Then we will pull them all up," declared Alcibiades, "if we cannot stay to enjoy them. The Bible says he that plants shall gather."

"He who planteth pickled olive-stones shall gather bottles full of them in some future time," asserted Tom.

"I remember how the soldiers, once, on being ordered from a certain post, slipped into the gardens the night before leaving and pulled up the sweet-potatoes, though the roots were nothing but strings," said McBriar.

"Here is my contribution," cried Heron, who had exerted himself until he was red in the face in digging up a clump of the Spanish bayonet, which he found growing near, and now proceeded to transplant. "This should claim precedence of all the rest. It was the first thing made use of by our very-great-grandparents when expelled from Eden. From that day to this it has been known as *Adam and Eve's thread and needle*, though Texans call it *bear-grass*."

The first time Tom found himself alone with his cousin he determined to satisfy his curiosity on a certain point.

"Kate," said he, "there is one thing I should like

to know. How did you come by the password that night? Did Nora bribe some soldier to betray it?"

"That word is exactly what I wish you to discover," she replied. "It was a mere accident. I—I should say, Lieutenant Heron," and the girl smiled amid her blushes, "did not give the precise word, but something that answered. The sentinels laughed and applauded your wit, and let us pass. The word given was *thunder-and-lightning*."

"Can you remember who were the sentinels?" said Tom, pondering.

"One was red-headed and cross-eyed. I remember I feared he was staring at O'Brien, when he was looking straight at me."

On this hint young Heron acted, and was soon in possession of the solution of the password enigma. The word had been *electricity*.

"Miss Kate, I have brought you a jar of wild flowers to set in your chimney," and Nora placed the pot of fragrant spring blossoms on the hearth.

"Thank you, Nora," said Miss Comerford, rising from the lounge on which she had been reclining, deeply interested in the pages of a French novel, her forgotten sewing having fallen on the floor, where her little Chihuahua dog was making an unsatisfactory lunch on her spool of cotton.

"I have just been wishing for some asparagus boughs to fill that gaping cavity. It makes me homesick to think of asparagus. My grandmother always kept it in the fireplace in summer, and a bunch over

the long mirror. The white blossoms are wild-plum; but what is the purple one? That is new to me."

"The soldiers call it *sweet-scented buck-eye*," said Nora. "I wonder if these buck-eyes will do to keep off the rheumatism as well as the other kind, if carried in the pocket?"

"Undoubtedly," answered Miss Comerford. "The charm will prove as efficacious as a horseshoe ever does to keep off witches. But what else, Nora? I see you have not come simply to bring me the flowers."

"Miss Kate, let me brush out your hair and dress it for you," said Nora, running into the next room for the combs and brushes and proceeding to let down the young lady's long fair tresses, which she began vigorously brushing.

"I have had a line from O'Brien," began Nora, her position hiding her blushes from Miss Kate. "He is in New York, and wishes me to join him. Mrs. Brown is going down to Santone by the next train, her husband being detailed for the recruiting service; and I could get a place as lady's maid, and so save my travelling expenses. But what reason can I make to Mrs. Duval for laving her? An' sure me heart is heavy as lead whin I think o' dissertin' my precious baby. I dare not tell Mrs. Duval the thruth. An', faith, I almost fear to go on to join O'Brien, lest that scamp, Hays, might suspect something. He is that hateful he would glory in the ruin of Mick. If I could get Mrs. Duval to turn me off and give me an excuse for going, that would help to throw dust in

the dirty eyes of him. But I haven't it in me heart to act in a misbecoming manner to so kind a lady as my mistress."

"Well, Nora, I think I can help you this time without donning Cousin Tom's uniform," said Kate, laughing; for the thoughtless girl was not so much ashamed of that escapade as she should have been. "I am sure Mrs. Duval can be trusted, and will be glad to hear of O'Brien's safety. I will undertake to make mischief between you and get her to dismiss you. To Mrs. Brown we shall say nothing; through her Mr. Boswell might hear more than we care to trust him with."

"I would not trust that man as far as I can toss a dog by the tail," declared Nora.

"Have you heard the news, Miss Kate?" she continued, ready, now that her own affair was settled, to impart tidings which might perhaps prove of more interest to her companion. "Lieutenant Waters has a letter from Mr. Volney, and that gentleman is coming back to Fort Fairfax, bringing with him his wedded wife. I thought he was desperately in love with yoursilf; at least, I know of more than one gentleman who was jealous enough of him. But that is the way with men. Let a girl refuse him, and he hastens to marry the first one that will have him."

"To show his first love that he did not care a fig for her,—that is, to prove how false were all his former vows," said Kate.

"Yes, sir, Miss Comerford is in," Uncle Hector was heard to answer; and before Nora could gather

up the flowing tresses, Lieutenant Hawthorn presented himself. Nora fled with the brushes, leaving the young lady to her own devices.

"'Tis pity to imprison those tresses within a comb," said Hawthorn. "Like the hair of Berenice, they should be placed among the stars."

"Even to attain that honor I could not consent to sacrifice my hair for the safety of any man living," said Miss Kate, gathering up the flowing mass, whose pale hue caused it to resemble flax on the distaff, rather than gold.

"Not even for a husband's sake, as did Berenice?" said the gentleman, devoutly wishing he stood in that relation to the blue-eyed beauty. "Speaking of husbands, Paul Volney has attained that dignity; here is the wedding notice:

"'On Tuesday, April 3d, at the house of the bride's father, Lieutenant Paul Volney, United States Army, to Señora Gregoria Moreno.'"

"A Mexican lady!" cried Kate, "and of course a Catholic. I shall be delighted to welcome Mrs. Volney to her new home. There is no way of sending an invitation now, but of course they will come directly to our house."

Hawthorn made no reply; and as she looked up in some surprise, after securing her hair as well as she could with only hairpins at hand, she noticed his eyes fixed on the book she had been reading.

"I trust this style of literature is not to your taste, Miss Comerford," he at length said. "I would not permit a—a sister of mine to touch one of Eugene

Sue's pernicious works. Snow and pitch should not come in contact. Let me destroy this mess of poison;" and he put the book in his coat-pocket.

No displeasure at his peremptory proceeding, but rather a feeling of pride and joy at this evidence of the interest with which she had inspired him, at first flashed across her mind. But when she remembered his coldness after the discovery of her engagement to Volney, and also that nothing had occurred to give him the right to interfere with her choice of books, the hot blood mounted to her forehead, and she held out her hand for the volume.

"It must be a weak head and tottering principles that can be upset by the reading of a novel," she said. "I do not draw my theology or philosophy from such sources. Indeed, I usually forget the whole story in a week after reading it."

"Impossible; we cannot touch pitch and be undefiled. We pray not to be led into temptation; then let us not foolishly enter into it."

"I deny your right to judge for me. I fancy our views would often conflict." She spoke petulantly, thinking of what his opinion would be of her part in O'Brien's release. "Beware lest your immaculate robes suffer from contact with my pitch-besmeared hands—as you politely term them." And she looked down on her little pink palms as if expecting to see traces of the dark stains.

A real shame was at the bottom of this bitterness, for Kate never read one of Sue's novels without compunction.

"Give me the right to judge for you, and to walk through life with this little hand clasped in mine. You need a——"

"Master to keep me in the right path, you would say," she cried, indignantly, snatching away her hand, which he had dared to touch. "Thanks, I prefer——"

"A slave, perhaps," interrupted he, "or one who can see no fault in you, and has no courage to cross one of your whims. Alas! women are not angels; nor would they be fit wives for sinful men were they faultless."

"Truly, your occupation would be quite gone could you have no one with whom to find fault. For me, I care not for the love that is too clear-sighted. I do not hope to be mistaken for an angel, but in the sight of my lover my very faults must appear as virtues." This nonsense ran from her tongue in spite of her judgment and heart. She would have despised the lover she painted, but the imp of the Perverse (as Edgar A. Poe would say) spoke for her.

"Shall I send McBriar? he will doubtless do his best to" ("fool you to the top of your bent," he had almost said, but substituted)—"to gratify you."

"Cannot Mr. Hawthorn conceive it possible that my heart may be quite free, and yet not be taken captive by his handsome person and admirable qualities of mind?" And then she added, slyly smiling, "and especially by his unique style of wooing."

"Farewell! I will not again annoy Miss Comerford by wooing in any style whatever." This with a low

bow and a movement towards the door, but without offering to give up the book,—that bone of contention.

"Perhaps you will leave my book, as you no longer take any interest in my morals," said the young lady, determined to have the last word.

"I will not!" said the gentleman, walking off. "No interest in her!" he said to himself. "In what else do I take interest? Her very perversity, which should warn me of the danger of trusting my happiness in her keeping, but acts as another charm. Every strand of that flaxen hair is entwined about my heart."

"Happy the wooing that's not long a-doing," said Kate, when left alone, "for long courtships are prone to end in confusion," and then she shed a few tears. Her next movement was to draw from under the cushion of the lounge the second volume of the book; then she lighted a candle, and, sitting near the hearth, deliberately tore out and burned, leaf by leaf, every scrap of that delectable work.

"Mr. Eugene Sue, if I had you here I should take pleasure in cremating you as a peace-offering. How dare you make mischief between people!" and Kate sighed.

A knock at the door, and the rugged features and sturdy figure of the surgeon came in view.

"Miss Comerford is apparently trying to kindle a bonfire. Or is it love-letters she has been consuming? Whew! how inodorous they smell! Now, had I written you any, they would have burned like a pine-knot,

sending forth a spicy fragrance, not smouldering in this fashion."

"The fragrance of opium and assafœtida," said Miss Comerford, in no good humor.

"That reminds me," continued the irrepressible man, "I once indulged in a poem, a love-sonnet, in which I had occasion to use the word *assiduity*. It came out in print *assafœtida*. That stumble lamed my Pegasus for life. I have done all my love-making in prose since then.

"Hawthorn stumbled against me just now, as I turned the corner by the new *ruins;* and when I asked if he were as blind as Cupid, he told me, by way of apology, to go to Hades. I told him I would go in the opposite direction, or he would certainly run against me again."

"Dr. McBriar," said Miss Kate, solemnly, "I hate stale jokes. If I could not be witty and original at the same time, I should be content with my native dulness."

"Perhaps I had better withdraw and call again when the storm is over and 'stars are in the quiet sky,'" said the doctor, humbly. "I seem to have escaped Scylla to fall upon Charybdis. Excuse me. I would have originated that saying if some one had not anticipated me. Between you and Hawthorn I seem to be caught in a thunder-storm. By the way, that is a funny story Heron tells about a password. —*thunder-and-lightning* being used accidentally when *electricity* was the word."

Kate caught her breath for a moment, but soon felt

satisfied that her cousin had, in telling the anecdote, located the scene elsewhere than in Texas.

"Give me some music before I go, Miss Kate; you know 'music has charms to soothe the savage breast,'—meaning you, not me. My temper is as placid as a lake."

Kate seized her guitar impatiently, for she wished to be alone, and sang:

"'Fall not in love, dear girls, beware,
Oh, never fall in love.
Better lead apes—you know where—
Than ever fall in love.
* * * * * * *
"'And if you say them no,
They'll swear their hearts are broke,
And when half-dead with woe,
How fat and plump they look!'"

CHAPTER XIV.

On the arrival of Lieutenant Volney and bride they received a kind welcome at the hospitable canvas residence of the commanding officer of the post. The ladies pronounced Mrs. Volney quite a beauty, though somewhat of the wax-doll order. She was a *petite* brunette, with large, soft brown eyes and the minute hands and feet usual among the Spanish ladies, and, in speaking English, she had the sweetest touch of an accent.

The pair were as happy as children, but Paul de-

lighted in teasing his wife until her quick temper caught fire and made her forget her English, for in excitement she always broke into melodious Spanish.

"Paul has evidently confided to her that I was his first love," remarked Miss Comerford to Mrs. Ashbur; "for what purpose I cannot say. She was at first very shy of me, and watched every word that passed between her husband and myself, but is quite at ease now. She often tells me how Mr. *Bolney*, as she calls him, admires dark eyes and jetty locks, and naïvely asks if I do not think flaxen hair rather like a *niño*. Yesterday she informed me that her husband said first love was never more than skin-deep. 'Practice makes perfect, you know; still, I hope my Paul has not had *much* practice. Now don't you really believe he loves me, oh, ever so much better than he once loved you? And did I not steal his heart from you when he still thought you cared for him?'

"'Most certainly,' I admitted, 'and I am quite sure, had he known you first, he never would have thought of me.'

"'Then all is well!' she cried, 'and I can love you dearly. But, oh, how I should have hated you, had I found you still cared for my husband! How unpleasant it is to have to dislike people! and Father Dias, who came up from San Antonio with us, says it is also very wicked.'"

Every Catholic at the post assisted in the Easter preparations. The priest was engaged in preparing the children, hearing confessions, urging on the slothful, etc.

On Easter morning the little prairie chapel was one blaze of light, flowers, and fragrance, and every one went to mass. Long benches were placed before the door for the soldiers who could not crowd in. How lovely the children looked in their white robes and flowing veils! Bearded men, who had not for years received their Lord in the Holy Sacrament, now knelt at the altar.

Mrs. Ashbur whispered to her husband as she pressed his hand, "How blessed it would be if they could kneel together, as Mrs. Silvers and her husband are now doing!"

Hawthorn's mother had been a Catholic, though, dying when he was an infant, her child had been educated a Protestant. But for some time he had been fully convinced, yet feared to trust himself, lest his judgment might have been unduly influenced by his love for Kate Comerford, or that his friends would believe him moved only by a hope of winning her. He hesitated no longer, but, having prepared himself the previous day, went forward and received baptism on this lovely Easter morning.

The glad strains of the *Regina Cœli* were echoing in their ears as the first Christian congregation of Fort Fairfax went slowly down the hill to their homes, the children rolling bright, vari-colored Easter-eggs as they went along, having smuggled them into the chapel in their pockets.

Kate gave her hand to Hawthorn as they stepped through the chapel door, while tears of joy stood in her beautiful eyes.

And Mrs. Volney was heard to exclaim, "Oh, how funny to see Mr. Hawthorn baptized just like a little *niño!*" so unusual is it among the Mexicans to witness the baptism of an adult.

The day after Easter, Volney and Hawthorn were oberved walking together, engaged in serious conversation. The topic which so interested them was not the relative strength of a first and second love, so lately discussed between Mrs. Volney and Miss Comerford.

"What books have you been reading, Hawthorn, and what arguments had most weight with you in getting rid of prejudices and convincing your judgment? I know you are not the man to take the step you did yesterday without due thought. I should, of course, like to gratify my wife by being of one faith with her. But some of your Catholic beliefs are hard to swallow,—in fact, they stick in my throat,—indulgences, the impossibility of the pope's committing sin, the harm of eating meat on Fridays, and so on. Now, as to confession, while I see no reason why the priests should not have the same power given them to forgive sins that the apostles undoubtedly had, I hold it utterly impossible that any man should remember all the sins of his life. Why, it would require days to enumerate mine; and I should certainly forget, when in the act of confession, half of those I had called to mind an hour previous. Talk of stage-fright! the hauling out all of my secret faults and misdoings for the inspection of a fellow-mortal would be the big scare of my life."

"The greater the 'scare,' if the shame proceed from a right motive, the more effective the penance," said Hawthorn. "Impossibilities are not required of us; the sins which you really are unable to recall are included in the absolution; for we especially ask pardon for 'all those sins which we cannot now recall.'

"No one will ask you to believe in the *impeccability* of the pope, only that he is prevented, by the grace of God, from teaching error in matters of faith, precisely as the apostles were."

"Is that all?" said Paul. "I do not have to be taught that Catholics are not idolaters, for I never believed that nonsense. Nor do I see any objection to asking the saints to pray for us, if they can hear us ask. I am sure I should like any one who has reached heaven to put in a good word for me occasionally."

"I will give you a list of the books I have read, though I cannot say just how much I have been influenced by any one of them. I have used Milner's 'End of Controversy'; 'Points of Controversy,' by Smarius; Newman's works, especially his 'Apologia pro Vita Sua'; Allies' 'See of Peter'; Hays's 'Sincere Christian'; Father Hecker's 'Aspirations of Nature' and 'Questions of the Soul.' I have also been much interested in a book called 'The Path that led a Protestant Lawyer into the Catholic Church.' Any books that I have are at your service. Of course, I have not failed to study diligently the Book of books."

Volney, who was not a great reader, seemed rather

overpowered at this long array of authorities to be consulted. Still, being very much in earnest, he determined to tackle with the 'End of Controversy' at once, perhaps hoping thus to escape the intermediate steps.

"One thing is certain, Volney: I have not been influenced or helped out of my difficulties by reading controversial novels. My luck with books of this sort has been rather unfortunate. Such as I have read have proved so intolerably dull that their tendencies have been in the opposite direction. However, I think Catholics of talent should be encouraged to write works of fiction, so that the taste for this kind of reading among Catholics may not be fed altogether by works adverse to the Church, such as Disraeli's 'Lothair,' the 'Schönburg-Cotta Family,' and others."

When the time came for Father Dias to leave Fort Fairfax, there was as much grief expressed as if he had been their pastor for years. This little flock in the wilderness without a shepherd had also become very dear to the old man, and he promised to visit them again as early as possible. The band turned out in his honor, and he was escorted a mile on his homeward way by the sorrowing soldiers.

Lieutenant Brown and his pretty wife left at the same time, taking with them Nora Ryan, to the great disgust of the Duval children, who considered themselves badly treated, and to the sorrow of their mamma, who could not hope to find so faithful a nurse.

According to Nora's prudent counsel, the soldier, Hays, had his sharp optics blinded by Nora's dismissal from Mrs. Duval's service for some alleged offence, that she might not be suspected of leaving of her own accord.

But privately Mrs. Duval parted with her warm-hearted nurse in the most friendly manner, and not without bestowing a handsome sum towards starting the faithful couple in housekeeping.

CHAPTER XV.

WINNY and Clay were searching for worms (snakes the little girl called them) in the *lignum-vitæ* grove near their home, to be used as fishing-bait. Their hearts were set on going a-fishing in the brook; and that Mrs. Ashbur might feel at ease about little Winny, Cousin Kate had been coaxed into joining the excursion. Having been duly informed by his friend, Gustavus Duval, of the contemplated fishing-party, Mr. Hawthorn offered his services as escort.

"Perhaps, as it is but a short walk, and in full view of the soldiers at work in their garden, my father may trust us to your protection, though he vowed he never would again," said Kate.

"I think he will, even though I shall not have the benefit of O'Brien's superior wisdom," said the gentleman.

A blush mantled Miss Comerford's cheek at the very mention of the name of O'Brien, but was accredited by her companion to the reminiscences of that day on the prairie when he saved her life and lost his own heart. The wound left by the arrow in his arm had healed, but the wound in the heart yet awaited the healing touch of the hand which he still hoped to call his own.

The two elders of the fishing-party now entered the grove to remind the children it was time to set out.

Winny, whose search for snakes had not been successful, was appealing to the divining-powers of a large granddaddy-long-legs. "Gandaddy-long-legs, 'here's the *worms?*" said the little girl, earnestly.

"Now, Winny dear, haven't I told you *they* can't tell where anything is 'cept the *cows?* It is not their business to hunt for worms," remonstrated Clay Ashbur, putting another worm into his tin cup.

"But this one knows," cried Winny. "See, he pints up, so I s'pose the worms have gone to roost in the trees."

"Winny, you must not say *pint*, like a little nigger. Mother says *point.* Besides, worms never climb trees; they always sleep under the ground, and just wait there until we die to eat us up. Alcy Duval says the more worms we kill the fewer there will be left to gnaw us when we are dead, and if a boy can manage to kill all the worms that are waiting for him he won't be eaten at all."

"Well, Clay, have you collected bait enough?"

inquired Mr. Hawthorn, breaking in on this learned exposition of what follows death.

"Here is nearly a pint of them," said Clay, showing his cup.

"Oh, Cay," cried Winny, "'hy don't you say point?"

The corrector corrected looked half inclined to admit his mistake, or puzzled to explain the difference, when Mr. Hawthorn came to his assistance:

"No matter, Clay; it will all come right to you and Winny in course of time. Much older heads than yours are puzzled over the intricacies and inconsistencies of the English language. Can you tell me, Miss Kate, why these long-limbed insects are supposed to know, any more than ants or crickets, the whereabouts of the 'milky mothers of the herd,' as Sir Piercie Shafton would say?"

"For the same reason that the *lady-bug* is the only bug whose house is always on fire, and the ground-hog the only animal which can foretell the coming of spring by consulting his own shadow," answered Miss Comerford.

"Miss Kate," cried Alcy Duval, hurrying up with his brother, "I have brought you a beautiful pet."

"Please, Alcy," exclaimed Kate, jumping behind Mr. Hawthorn, "do not let that rat go! I am terribly afraid of rats!"

"*Rat!*" and the amount of indignation conveyed in that monosyllable was immense. "This is a beautiful *prairie-dog*. Did you *ever* see a sorrel rat?" demanded the mortified Alcibiades.

"Excuse me," said Kate, coming nearer; "I am so much obliged. I have long wanted to see a prairie-dog. But why are they called dogs? there is no likeness."

"Wait until you hear him bark," said Gussy. "Shall we take him to your house and fasten him up for you till you come home? We can catch up with you."

"If you please, and do not let him devour my little dog before he finds out that they are of one family," said Kate.

As they passed the garrison garden a little child of about Winny's age, who was playing around her father at his work, ran up and offered the boys a handful of worms for their sport. Just at this moment the old Indian, who still lived with the soldiers, entered the garden. The child turned deadly pale, screamed, and threw herself into Mr. Hawthorn's arms. He ordered the Indian to get out of sight, and, lifting the child, carried her to her father.

"No wonder," said he, as they walked on, "she is thrown into spasms at the sight of an Indian. This is the child whose mother was killed by the savages, and she herself escaped a like fate, almost by miracle, when but two years of age. The father and mother, with this child in their arms, had wandered a few rods from the camping-ground to a spring, when the Apaches sprang out from their ambush behind the rocks, and seized the woman and child, firing at, but missing, the man. He gave the alarm, and the captors were so closely pursued they dropped the baby,

knowing the soldiers would stop to pick it up. But, finding at length they could not escape with the woman, they killed her. We pass her lonely grave on the road to El Paso, near Eagle Spring. That child should be taken where she could never see or hear of an Indian. Near that same place a sutler's train, imprudently travelling with too small an escort, was attacked by night, the horses all taken, and most of their stores. Fortunately a pair of oxen was left them, and thus they crept slowly on, but before their journey's end were reduced to living on canned fruit. The sutler's wife told me that, for years after, the very sight of canned peaches made her shudder. The weather was cold, and, progressing so slowly, they often had to camp where no firewood could be obtained. So the furniture had to be sacrificed. Chairs, bedstead, tables, and chests were reduced to ashes. At last, the very cradle of the baby, which they had hoped to save, was used for firewood to cook a breakfast of blackbirds they had been so fortunate as to secure."

"'Hy couldn't dey eat bread and butter, and save de baby's cradle?" was Winny's comment.

Following the bank of the stream, the fishing-party soon came to a little fall. Below this the water grew deeper and was shaded by a fringe of willow-trees. After the usual amount of trouble about baiting the hooks and untangling the lines which were carelessly thrown over the willow-branches, all settled down to the business of the hour, speaking only in whispers, for fear of scaring the fish.

Half an hour went by in this way. Miss Comerford's eyes were on the water, watching the fish as they coquetted with the bait. Mr. Hawthorn's eyes wandered often to the face of the bewitching maiden by his side.

Left to themselves, Clay and Winny had taken off their shoes and stockings and waded out into the cool water. They were standing on a large stone, which projected some distance into the brook, and reaching over to gather the green, cress-like plants that grew at the bottom of the stream. But the clearness of the water below their standing-place deceived them as to its depth. As the pretty waving green leaves eluded her grasp, little Winny, leaning forward, made one unlucky snatch, and, missing her aim, the little bare feet slipped, and, headforemost, she tumbled into the water.

Clay Ashbur gave one cry of horror and jumped in after her. Although he could swim when unincumbered, still he could not possibly have saved her.

Gustavus Duval had also exchanged the tedium of angling for the more congenial fun of riding on the swinging branch of the willow, which, in its downward sway, brought his feet into the water. He could swim like a duck, and was throwing off his jacket for a drop into the water, but, perceiving that Mr. Hawthorn had come to the rescue, he prudently waited, reserving himself as a forlorn hope.

Hawthorn seized the little girl, and was in the act of climbing the bank with her in his arms, near the

foot of the willow-tree, when Gustavus, taken up with his anxiety for Winny, let go his hold, lost his balance, and tumbled into the brook. His fall would have been of no consequence had not the limb, relieved of his weight, in the rebound struck Hawthorn on the chest with such force as to throw him and his precious burden back into the water.

Kate had only time for one despairing cry, when she saw Alcy Duval spring in to the assistance of his brother, who was manfully supporting Winny; and in a few moments the two boys had landed the child safe in her outstretched arms.

But all was not yet well. The boys were horrified by a shout from Clay,—"Mr. Hawthorn is drowned! Help! help!"

He had gone down like lead, being stunned by the blow, and there he lay, face upward, in the clear water. The boys threw themselves again into the stream, and with many a hard pull and lift the three finally scrambled out with their heavy burden.

Winny had scarce lost consciousness, and was now looking about in seeming wonder to find herself so wet under the shawl Kate had wrapped about her. So that, quite relieved of anxiety on the child's account, Miss Comerford had dropped on her knees and was praying for the life of one only too dear to her.

She knelt now beside his prostrate form in mute anguish. The waving brown locks clung to the pale forehead, the deep-blue eyes were only half closed. She lifted the head to rest it against her beating

heart, but, remembering that the drowning should not be thus treated, she replaced the helpless head on the bank and turned him gently on one side, chafing the cold hands in hers.

"Go, boys!" she now cried; "run for help. Why do you stand idle? Bring the doctor. I will watch him."

The horrified lads threw off the stupor which benumbed their faculties. "Stay you here, Clay, and help Miss Kate; rub his feet hard. Gus and I will bring help," cried Alcy.

No sign of life appeared. The tears streamed from little Winny's eyes as she shivered and looked on bewildered.

"All is useless; he is gone, gone!" cried Kate Comerford. "Oh, my love, my love!" and she raised the cold hand to her lips and covered it with tears and despairing kisses. Was it that sad, heart-broken wail or was it those warm kisses that recalled the spirit and sent back the warm blood to the heart?

This was no case of drowning; the shock of the blow had suspended consciousness for a time: that was all.

The hand closed on hers. The two pairs of blue eyes, so unlike, and yet both speaking one language, now gazed into each other.

"Blessed water!" murmured the happy man; "in your depths I have found a pearl." And the dripping arms were thrown around the maiden, and one betrothal kiss was pressed on her brow before she could resist.

"I sinks he is alive, Cousin Kate," said little Winny. Kate rather thought so too.

"How dare you?" she cried, springing to her feet. "How long have you been conscious?" She was actually hoping that the kisses she had bestowed on his hand had preceded the return to entire consciousness.

"Only long enough to hear and feel what has made me the happiest man on earth, and what, I verily believe, nothing but my seeming death could have drawn from you, you cruel girl!"

"Mr. Hawthorn, it is time we were going home. See what a figure you have made of me! One would think I had been in the water too. Here is poor little Winny shivering with cold, and we doing nothing for her."

The gentleman arose and tried to get rid of some of the superfluous water which streamed from his garments by shaking himself.

"Throw this coat around your shoulders," he said, taking up his coat from the ground and putting it around her. Clay had already wrapped Winny in his own jacket, in addition to the shawl.

"Here they are!" shouted Alcy Duval. "And he has come to life. Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" echoed the three soldiers who had come with the doctor.

"Bless my soul! so he has," cried Dr. McBriar, shaking hands with Hawthorn. "And here is Waters with the ambulance. So jump in, ye drowned rats." Kate and Winny were helped in, Hawthorn fol-

lowed, and the three boys crowded in on the back seat.

"Whip up! drive fast, Jack," said the doctor, springing to the seat by Waters's side and taking Winny on his lap. "We shall listen to the story of the ducking after we get these mermaids and mermen into dry garments. Did you go in also, Miss Kate? The boys failed to report that."

"No," answered little Winny, "but Mr. Hawforn, he was so happy when he comed to life, he thes put his wet arms around Cousin Kate and tissed her."

This uncalled-for piece of information was received in dead silence. The doctor, in his agitation, came near letting Winny fall from his knee.

Miss Comerford blushed like twenty roses, and cast an angry glance at the moist gentleman by her side. Lieutenant Hawthorn did his best to look penitent, but could not for his life get up any contrition for his conduct. Both were thankful that Winny had said nothing of the caresses bestowed by the lady on the hand of the drowned man.

Jack Waters choked as badly with laughter as he had done when playing bridesmaid to Tom, and whipped the unoffending mules into a gallop.

Tom Heron, who received his cousin as she arrived at her own door, after dropping Winny and the doctor at Mrs. Ashbur's, listened to a few words from Waters, and then, gravely kissing Kate on the forehead, said, "I give you my permission and blessing, and promise not again to usurp your place as bride. I see you have Hawthorn's coat; I shall warn him

not to let you meddle with any other portion of his wardrobe !"

As this is not a novel,—only sketches,—it will not be expected of us to dispose of all the characters, either by marriage or death ; therefore we leave them to their own devices, and bid the kind reader adieu.

THE END.

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